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One of Us: Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Torgeir Ehler

June 2009

Advisor: Jan Gorak

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Abstract

This present work explores the relationship of Joseph Conrad's status as a Polish exile to his creative and biographical work. Its main focus is on the tandem publications of the novel *Under Western Eyes* and his autobiographical volume *A Personal Record*, both published within a year of each other and written contemporaneously. The first chapter is a short biographical survey of Conrad's life and addresses some later biographical works by his wife, among others. An overview of critical works that deal with *Under Western Eyes* is presented in the second chapter. An investigation into narrative structure and its use in creating a heteroglossic text is investigated in the third chapter. How this strategy reflects Conrad's personal stake in the novel and how the novel and its creation affected the author's ability to cope with his own *homo-duplex* geographies is also addressed herein. The fourth chapter then concerns itself with Conrad's attempt to create a truly heteroglossic, autobiographically based persona for public consumption in Britain, while keeping true to his function as a 'cultural bridge'. An early effort at communicating the exile's predicament and failure to bridge the cultural divide in the story 'Amy Foster' is taken up in the fifth and final chapter. The legacy of Conrad's effort is also discussed herein as relevant to the work of Milan Kundera and Erich Maria Remarque.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Joseph Conrad: A Polish-Englishman	9
I.	9
II.	28
III.	31
IV.	35
V.	38
VI.	41
VII.	45
Chapter 2: <i>Under Western Eyes</i> : Critical Assessments and Diagnoses	52
I: An Excursion into the Center	52
Chapter 3: <i>Under Western Eyes</i>	75
I: Story and the Reader	75
II: The Story Proper	79
III: The Teacher of Languages	88
IV: Homo-Duplex: Joseph Conrad's Invention of the Self and the Familiar Ground	99
V: The Writer and the Narrator: Conrad's Normalizing Efforts through the Fiction of <i>Under Western Eyes</i>	122
Chapter 4: Bridging the Channel	135
Chapter 5: Appearances, Facts, and Intent: Conrad as "One of Us"	172
I: Coding the Message	172
II: The Shock of Finally Landing: "Amy Foster"	177
III: Remembering to Forget: Conrad Soldiers on	187
Epilogue: Conrad's Legacy	195
Appendix A: Abbreviations	206
Bibliography	207

Introduction

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. [...] both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. [...] Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure. [...] Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew. (185-86)

Edward Said *Reflections on Exile*

“... I was put across the border. You know that from a legal point of view we haven’t the right to live anywhere without papers—and that most of us haven’t yet been able to make up our minds to commit suicide. That’s the reason we bother you.” (222)

*“What’s your name now?” Morosow asked.
“Still Ravic. I didn’t mention this name at the police station. ... I didn’t want to give up Ravic. I like it as a name.” (230-31)*

E.M Remarque *Arch of Triumph*

In examining Joseph Conrad’s work, it is imperative to consider the writer’s life and milieu. Issues of identity and fidelity – the latter one of Conrad’s favorite principles and tenets in life – are some of the forces that exert the greatest influence on his work. The several stages of his life: as the child of ‘dissident’ parents in

Russian and Austrian parts of partitioned Poland, as accompanying his exiled parents – thus in effect an exile himself – to a Russian bog at the age of nearly five, as a seaman in France and later as a seafarer and officer in the British merchant marine, a British subject, and, finally, a British novelist living on British soil and married to an English woman are considered here as types of geographies within and among which the author navigated. The term ‘geography’ as it is used in this study encompasses not only physical cartography, but also those geographies constructed through cultural and socializing influences, as well as by the individual in order for the self to situate itself properly within a socio-cultural space. Therefore, the term ‘socio-cultural geographies’ is meant to denote the cultural and socializing influences of a cultural entity such as Poland or England. This entity may exist on a physical and political map, but it may not. Socio-cultural geographies of Poland, for example, remained largely intact despite its political non-existence during the majority of Conrad’s lifetime, for example.

‘Personal geographies’ are used to denote those influences of socio-political geographies on the individual, mainly Joseph Conrad in this study, and the manner in which that individual’s experience has been processed and recombined from the larger into the personal. Since Conrad’s personal geographies include many facets and combinations of the larger wholes and since it is arguable that his point of view is always adapting and reacting to his surroundings, the term ‘provisional-personal geographies’ is used to denote these states of existence. Linguistics also play a role in creating geographies, thanks to cultural and social norms being linguistically

inscribed back onto a society and so onto its members. This creates a cyclical effect within which the socio-cultural sphere is interconnected with the linguistic sphere. Therefore, 'linguistic geographies' are similar to, yet not identical with socio-cultural geographies when it comes to Conrad. His multi-lingual socio-cultural geographies encompass differing facets of all the types of geographies mentioned to such a degree that it becomes nearly impossible to speak of one specific linguistic geography. Thus his personal geographies are always variant. Such personal geographies are termed 'provisional' since their particular configurations are not consistent over time and are dependent on passing circumstances.

At the root of a specific personal-provisional geography within which Conrad seems to have functioned and which was based upon particular situational circumstances and requirements, however, lies another type of geography from which any and all specific personal-provisional geographies originated. This type of geography is termed 'zero geography'. This 'zero geography' is pre-linguistic, yet contains what can be termed the 'center' and contains all the types of experiences and knowledge Conrad had absorbed. It is from this amalgamation of experience and knowledge that the specific personal geographies emerge through a commitment to a set of circumstances. The fact that it contains all of Conrad's cultural and linguistic capabilities allows for its understanding of situations and concepts that any single of his provisional geographies alone cannot. Its pre-linguistic state allows for the translation of its understanding of socio-cultural concepts and situations into any of the languages available to it. This in turn allows Conrad to function as an interpreter

or a ‘cultural bridge’ between the Eastern and the Western cultural camps, much in the same manner that Poland and Central Europe translate both cultural spheres in order to maintain their cultural equilibrium. Yet, unlike Central Europe, Conrad does not only interpret in order to maintain his own provisional geographies, but also in order to explain one cultural sphere to the other. Moreover, Conrad’s conditioning through his exile in the West allows him better to interpret for a Western, English-speaking audience because of his partial assimilation into its socio-cultural fabric. His ‘zero geography’ can be said to contain the necessary tools to perform the tasks of a ‘cultural bridge’ best when faced with an English-speaking audience, though it also is able to interpret the East to itself through ‘Western Eyes’ and the Center in a covert manner, as will later be seen in the analysis of *A Personal Record*.

Along with personal geographies, that is, geographies that pertain to one’s particular biography and are created through the process of living, a major consideration in this study is also Conrad’s original physical and cultural geography. This particular aspect of Conrad’s geography commonly carries the label of Eastern Europe. This particular influence and its effects can be discerned in all of the texts under consideration within this study. The label commonly applied to countries that physically and culturally lie in the east as well as those countries that the Anglo-French (and for most of the past century American) purview considers as ‘Eastern’ is contested here. The cultural and physical existence of a Central Europe and its relation to the West, that is the Anglo-French centered West, is put forth as a type of hybrid cultural geography. In effect, the Central Europe that consists of the Western

Slavic linguistic group and the countries, whether politically constituent at the time of Conrad's writing or not, it encompasses is presented as a 'cultural bridge'. This term is meant to suggest the notion that the dichotomy of a Western and an Eastern Europe divided into distinct camps is a false one. The hybrid cultures that make up Central Europe are, as Conrad repeatedly argued in the case of Poland, "Western in complexion" (*PR* ix). But it is not only an outward complexion, a hue presented to the onlooker from without that is Western, just as it is not only from a linguistic perspective that one can unearth aspects of an Eastern culture within the cultural geographies of the Center. Like Conrad's personal geographies, those cultural geographies of Central European peoples, and the Poles perhaps to the greatest degree, under the colonial Prussian, Russian, and, to a lesser degree, Austrian rule can be considered 'provisional-cultural geographies'.

Through the experiences gained as an exile, Conrad's personal geographies allowed him to function as an attuned 'cultural bridge' between the East and West of European cultural geographies. These abilities may have benefited his activity as a writer while also plaguing him on a personal basis with the concerns of an exile whose identity is dependent on maintaining a provisional-personal geography – much as Poland had been a cultural rather than a political geography for the majority of Conrad's lifetime. This provisional-personal geography may have been connected to his socio-cultural and linguistic geographies as a whole, yet was not fully dependent on any one of them. The effects of such dependency had proven disastrous in one instance that will be examined at length. These provisional-personal geographies

aided Conrad in dealing with concerns ranging from a general sense of alienation and an inability to fit in with his adoptive English culture, as dramatized within the story “Amy Foster,” to withdrawing from the stage of his novels and short stories in order to allow his writing to function as a means to bridge the cultures for the benefit of his English readership. In the case of “Amy Foster” and *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad had chosen to use a narratorial proxy to tell the story. This narrator in *Under Western Eyes*, the Teacher of Languages, interprets the ‘Russian’ story from the point of view of a West European in order to render it more comprehensible to the primary, English-speaking audience. The complexity of narration is greater at first glance in the case of “Amy Foster,” in which the narrator, Dr. Kennedy, relates the tale to the actual, unnamed narrator who writes it down. In both cases, the narrator’s persona is tailored to the audience that Conrad expected to gain. Though the issues of narrative technique this approach presents to the critic are numerous, the primary function Conrad’s narrators serve is to remove the writer from direct view and thus facilitate the readers’ comprehension of the narrative.

Though Conrad uses a type of assimilated narrator in a great majority of his works, the most important of these to this study are the Teacher of Languages and the authorial and ‘personal’ voice Conrad used in composing his reminiscences in *A Personal Record*. The latter narrator seems to have been intended to facilitate audience identification, rather than comprehension alone, with the stories he presented in a different manner from those used in Conrad’s fictional works. While in *Under Western Eyes* Conrad’s stated intention may have been “to render ... the

psychology of Russia itself,” in *A Personal Record* his aims seem to point at making his readers empathize with his author’s persona (UWE 281). This narrator’s voice seems tailored to display the author in the best possible terms and lacks any doubt about his desire to *be English*. That is, the narrator / author’s personal geographies seem to have been *intentionally assimilated* into the British cultural geography.

The surface aim within the pages of *A Personal Record* seems to be to bridge his cultural geographies. Closer examination reveals that in writing the volume Conrad had employed a tactic that incorporated his intended surface personal geographies as well as those geographies that were his through birth. His aims, whether intentional or not, must have been many-fold and must have included more than an anticipated reception by his English-speaking audience. Nevertheless, it was for the English-speaking audience that he stylized his personal geographies as *intentionally* English within the volume.

Both volumes seem to mark a point in Conrad’s development when issues of personal geography held the greatest amount of urgency for him. It is during the years of their composition that Conrad experienced the greatest amount of financial as well as physical difficulties. The latter of these hardships seems indicative of the importance these projects held for him. To bridge the cultural geographies of the East and West of Europe for him must also have meant to bridge the divide between his England and Poland, between his native cultural geography and his adoptive one. In short, it seems that Conrad was driven to present his English-speaking audience with intimations of his personal geographies as if his survival depended on his ability to

bridge the Eastern and Western European cultural geographies. In this attempt, Poland seems to have been the veiled cultural geography lying between the two major spheres of influence. It seems to have been the center of Europe, neither Eastern nor entirely Western, like Conrad himself, that intimated itself through the works under examination. It is in the spirit of attempting to better understand Conrad's exilic predicament, the influence that his original and adoptive cultural geographies exerted on his work, and the manner in which he endeavored to span the divide between those geographies that the following study proceeds.

Chapter 1: Joseph Conrad: A Polish-Englishman

I.

In his *Preface to Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* Ford Madox Ford states “[t]o write: ‘Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski was born on such a day of such a year in the town of ‘So and So’ in the Government of Kieff’, and so to continue would not conduce to such a rendering as this great man desired”(Ford v). He then continues “[i]t is the writer’s impression of a writer who avowed himself impressionist” (Ford vi). And so it is with this chapter regarding Conrad’s biographical circumstances: the aspects discussed here are by no means exhaustive in their scope.¹ Rather, this is an attempt to bring to the reader’s attention those elements of Conrad’s life which seem the most pertinent to the difficult birth of those books which are under discussion within the following pages.

It is with the aforementioned reasons in mind that we cannot escape the very thing that F.M. Ford manages to curtail in his volume of impressions. The very circumstances of Conrad’s birthplace and the political situation into which he was born served to shape

¹ For a thorough discussion of Conrad’s life see Najder’s *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*. Trans. Halina Carroll-Najder. Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge UP, 1983.

his future outlook on life and art, and exerted great influence on his perceptions of existence which are less obvious within the pages of his works. And, therefore, it is necessary to state that Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski was born on the 3rd of December 1857, in Berdyczow, Ukraine. This was a part of Poland that had been “annexed by Russia since 1793,” a fact that would ultimately cause Conrad to become an orphan and an exile twice over (Knowles and Moore, xi).

His parents both were of the *Slachta* class, that is of the landed nobility native to the Polish political system. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was a poet and translator with nationalist sentiments which he put into practice in preparation to the 1863 uprising. His suspected involvement in the uprising caused him to be imprisoned and exiled to the Russian swamps of Vologda along with his wife, Ewa Bobrowska, and their son. By 1863, the family was allowed to move to Chernikhov, near Kiev. Ewa was by now rather ill, as Conrad and Apollo were intermittently, and died in April of 1865 of consumption. Conrad, in the care of his grandmother Bobrowska, spent time at her country house, but reportedly suffered from epileptic symptoms and migraines. He was reunited with his father in Chernikov, but required frequent medical attention in Kiev. The illnesses seemed to follow him throughout 1866 – 67. His father’s condition meanwhile worsened as the two relocated first to Lwow and then to Krakow, in Austrian Poland. Conrad supposedly began writing at this point, mostly pieces concerned with nationalistic themes of Poles fighting against their Russian oppressors. And it was also in Krakow that Apollo died on 23 May 1869, leaving the eleven-year-old Conrad, essentially, to the care of his uncle Tadeus Bobrowski, though his grandmother and a family friend also had initial influence in his upbringing. Conrad found himself at the head of his father’s funeral

procession through the streets of Krakow, an event that served as a sign of national protest against the continued suppression of Poland under foreign rule. Although it is doubtful that the meaning for the general population would have been entirely clear to Conrad in his perceptions of the event, one can certainly conjecture that he must have understood its significance then as he did later in life. Yet at the very moment the procession was taking place, his mind must have been working over ground that was his alone. Conrad had become an orphan, despite a large extended family and group of caretakers. He was officially placed in the care of his maternal grandmother, with whom he lived in Krakow from 1870 – 73.

During this time, his relatives attempted to secure Austrian citizenship for Conrad, in the hopes that this would exempt him from owing military service to Russia. They were unsuccessful in their efforts. In May of 1873 Conrad went on a trip to Switzerland, accompanied by his tutor, Adam Pulman. It is there that Conrad recalled having met the mysterious and imposing Scotsmen, who made him wish he were one of them, or at least like them.² Upon his return to Krakow, he was sent to live at a boarding school in Lwow, which could be considered a form of exile, since the area was populated predominately by speakers of Ukrainian rather than Polish, thus creating a cultural divide. The very fact, however, that Ukrainian was spoken all around him (outside of his immediate vicinity of the school) and that his previous exilic experiences were in Russian-speaking territories, may contradict later claims that he never spoke a word of Russian.³ It is in a similar manner that Conrad's stay in Krakow and trip to Switzerland

² For a full account see *A Personal Record*, p. 37 -45.

³ Though linguistically variant, Russian and Ukrainian are both Eastern Slavic languages and use the Cyrillic alphabet, whereas Polish is a Western Slav language and uses a modified Roman alphabet for its notation. Differences in grammar and pronunciation are also apparent at first glance. Though the languages may be, in some part, mutually intelligible, they are not so entirely and require a very young or very adapt

both indicate that he must have been at least slightly proficient in German. This language, after all, was that of the colonizing / occupying forces in the Krakow region and the primary language within the region of Switzerland he had visited.⁴

It was from Krakow, in October of 1874, that Conrad decided to embark on a seafaring life. His decision seems to have been driven by romantic notions gathered from his childhood reading, as outlined by not a few biographers and critics, but, perhaps more importantly, it seems to have been a chance to assert himself as a human being. Having been thrown from one end of Russian occupied territories to another, Conrad was also facing the impending prospect of military service in the Russian army. For a Pole with a familial history of patriotism for which his parents had given their lives, serving the Russian autocracy, whatever this may have required of him, must not have seemed like an option. Though his uncle Tadeus Bobrowski had been labeled an appeaser of the Russian and Austrian regimes, he did not seem to object vigorously enough to Conrad's decision. He assented to the enterprise and actually financed his going abroad, seeking out a spot on a French vessel for young Conrad through his business contacts.

These aspects of his Polish days are significant to Conrad's later development and efforts as a writer and novelist. His childhood consisted of uncertainty and forced nomadicism in the form of exile and repression of parents and country by an outside power.⁵ Such things cannot but imprint themselves on a developing consciousness. The

ear to gain hold of their variant cultural meanings and sounds. Conrad was still young enough – and had previously come into contact with Ukrainian and Russian – to be able to discern and function within the bounds of these tongues.

⁴ In her account of the Conrads' 1914 trip to Poland, Jessie Conrad wrote that "[Conrad] suddenly launched out into German" a fairly strong indication that he indeed recalled enough of the language to speak it in a functional manner (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*, 90).

⁵ If one were to so desire, it would be just as fair to call the Russian and Austrian occupations of Poland attempts at colonizing the area and attempting to "civilize" the natives. An East Prussian Colonizing incentive was well in place in the German sections of partitioned Poland well into the beginning of the Great War. This plan did not drastically alter racial / ethnic distribution of the local settled populations, but

somewhat reductive, Freudian argument that follows from such an assertion – that the young Joseph Conrad had become used to a certain type of life while in his parents’ care and, subconsciously, sought to emulate it – cannot be entirely dismissed. Yet, he did make his own choice in going to sea. He had chosen to be a different kind of exile, for all he could become at that point in time – thanks to a lack of interest and effort in school subjects or business, and to being a nationalist Pole – had been reduced to a martyr, like his father, a soldier in the Tsar’s army, or an exile. He had chosen the last. That choice must have made him feel empowered and later it proved to have other consequences as well. Although Ian Watt argues that “Conrad did not choose his exile – the fate of his family and his country forced it on him,” and that his “exile was much more absolute” as opposed to that “of Joyce and Lawrence, Pound, and Eliot” or of the generation of writers to follow, it must be taken into account that one always has a choice (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 32). Conrad might not have had a choice in becoming an exile, yet he did have a choice in the type of exile he chose to become. It was in this manner that he was empowered to shed the constraints that bound him *within* his native land, not *to* it. He may not have written for publication in his native tongue, nor did he use Poland as an overt subject of his fiction. There was, however, an undercurrent within much of that fiction that stemmed from his background and at times used that background, albeit never in an outright statement. In his memoirs and other non-fictional writing such as *A Personal Record*, his background indeed does become the subject. Though his exile may have been quite “absolute” in many ways, Conrad was not barred from coming and going

it did change the economic standing of Poles versus Prussians (Germans) in favor of the latter. For a detailed study of the Prussian efforts to Germanize Silesia and other, occupied regions of Poland, see Koehl, Robert Lewis. “Colonialism Inside Germany: 1886-1918.” *The Journal of Modern History* 25.3 (1953): 255-72.

from Poland. He was not tried for desertion of country by any but the court of public opinion in his later life. Simply put, Conrad's choice to become the type of exile he became was one of the possible choices left to him as a young man coming into adulthood and perhaps the best, given the circumstances. Thus he went to Marseilles with his uncle's blessings, and, like most who have made a choice between a forced life and one in which they retain at least the fundamental human freedom to make the best of one's life under a set of given circumstances, Conrad attempted to function within this new environment. He signed on to a French ship and began his voyaging, possibly in awe of his, thus far, land-locked life opening out into the books he had so admired as a boy.

While French ships served to deliver his initiation to seafaring, Conrad could not join the French merchant marine due to the treaties between France and Russia, according to which he could not become a French subject so long as he owed military service to the Russian crown. His French period is also rumored – a conjecture on the part of biographers and critics which is bolstered by Conrad's remembrance of his days on the *Tremolino*⁶ – to have included a gun running venture to the Carlist struggle for the Spanish throne. He is supposed to have had a bad gambling problem – outlined in great detail in Najder's *A Chronicle* – which led him to make an attempt on his own life by shooting himself in the chest. The bullet did not wound him seriously, however. He later utilized this period in writing the novel *Arrow of Gold*. As with all his fiction, it had basis in experience and its memory and in the speculations that surrounded his days in Marseilles. He did alter – or we could also speculate that he had been true to the “spirit”

⁶ See *The Mirror of the Sea*, 155-177.

of the enterprise – the suicide incident into a duel with an American Carlist supporter. Perhaps this reworking served to make the incident more palatable to himself and others, and to appease his uncle and himself in their shared catholic principles. It is of little consequence whether either of the men – Conrad in particular – had at that time been practicing faithful.

Whether or not Conrad had a gambling problem, he did spend extravagant amounts of his allowance and wrote many letters to Bobrowski, in which he seems to have embellished the events of his life abroad and thus attempted to justify his asking for more funds. On the occasion of the Marseilles shooting incident, Bobrowski interrupted his stay in Kiev and traveled to meet Conrad. He settled Conrad's debts and, according to Bobrowski's letter to Bucinski, "it was decided that [Conrad] should join the English Merchant Marine" (qtd. in *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 53).

Conrad sailed on a British ship before ever setting foot on British soil. His initial arrival in England was on June 10th, 1878, at Lowestoft. From there, he made three trips aboard the "*Skimmer of the Sea* as an ordinary seaman" (Knowels and Moore xxvi). After this initial experience, Conrad went to London, where he underwent further financial difficulties and finally signed on to the *Duke of Sutherland*, aboard which vessel his efforts at seamanship and an actual career in the Merchant Marine became a reality. Though financial issues never seemed to leave him, Conrad passed his second and first mate's examinations during the following years, was naturalized a British subject and passed the master's examination in 1886. In 1889, he was finally released from Russian subjection. In 1890, he made his first return visit to Poland. Upon his return to England he found that an appointment with a Belgian firm that traded on the Congo River was

confirmed. He was to captain one of their steam ships that plied the river, a command which was cut short by company policy changes and his bad health. This particular experience provided the impetus for writing *Heart of Darkness* (Knowels and Moore).

After his return to London and a three-month hospital stay, Conrad sought further medical treatment at Champel-les-Bains, Switzerland. He returned to London and signed on to the *Torrens*, upon which he then sailed to Australia and, during its return leg, met John Galsworthy. During the summer of 1893, Conrad made his second return visit to the Ukraine and spent several weeks there in the summer months. That same year, he signed on to the *Adowa*, yet the ship never sailed and Conrad signed off it in January of the following year. Not a month later, Tadeus Bobrowski died, leaving Conrad, aged 36, without that last anchor. His seagoing career had also come to its close with the failure of the *Adowa* assignment. Conrad was, however, in the midst of finishing the first draft of *Almayer's Folly*, which was to be the beginning of his new life as a writer. Conrad's "exile was much more absolute" now than it had been previously (Watt 32). His familial ties were severed and his life as a seaman was finished as well. He had inherited some money from his uncle, but with Conrad's penchant for spending it, even this tidy sum could not keep him afloat for long.

Fortunately, the typescript of *Almayer's Folly* he sent to T. Fisher Unwin in July was accepted for publication in October, after his second stay in the Swiss spa and the start of his second volume of fiction, *An Outcast of the Islands*. By the close of 1894, Conrad met his future wife, Jessie George. The marriage was not to take place for more than a year after their first meeting. Of some significance is the time between their meeting and marriage. It was, after all, during that time that Conrad not only became a

published novelist, visited his only relative abroad, Marguerite Poradowska (an aunt by marriage) with whom he is rumored to have formed something of a romantic attachment, but it is also during this time that Conrad had attempted several business ventures (in which he lost most of his inheritance), and also took his third Swiss water cure.

According to Zdislaw Najder, Conrad is supposed to have formed a romantic attachment with a girl of twenty, “from a well-off and cultured French family” while at the spa (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 177). Emilie Briquel seems to have been quite impressed with Conrad’s English sailor and writer persona and the two spent quite a bit of time in each other’s company. Conrad gave her an inscribed copy of *Almayer’s Folly*. Najder quotes the inscription in whole. Its text was originally in English.

“To Miss Emily Briquel—whose charming musical gift and everbright presence has cheered for him the dull life in Champel, this book is presented by her most humble, grateful and obedient servant—the Author.” On the same day Mlle Briquel resumed her English lessons. And again more walks and conversations ... (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 178).

Najder further points out that “for Emilie Briquel, eighteen years his junior, one thing is clear: Conrad turned her head. The rest remains uncertain. ... Konrad Korzeniowski (as he still was on his passport) never breathed a word about his Polish origin: in Champel he passed for an Englishman” (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 183). Subsequently, Conrad also managed to weave a tangle of half-truths by omission, which would have made a sustained effort in the courtship quite possibly fruitless were he to reveal his deception. And although the mind and sensibilities of a modern American reader may find the issue of origin trivial, it is unlikely that being a Polish-Englishman

would have gone over well, especially since it had initially been kept back from Mlle Briquel, a member of the French upper class. An understanding that seems to exist on, at the very least, a nominal level in our time could not have been assumed to exist in 1895. Thus Conrad “was unable to find a fitting way out of the tangle without damaging the relationship” according to Najder (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 183). He could not have confessed the implied deception and expect an understanding reception from his audience. In this very real probability lies what can be considered another crux of the issue of his future marriage.

With Jessie George, Conrad could speak honestly about his origins without the fear of being shunned. Jessie, unlike Mlle Briquel, was not in a position to frown on the proposals of someone of Conrad’s rank in society, despite his country of origin. After all, Conrad had managed to attain a captain’s rank in the merchant marine, elevating his social stature above that of Jessie, a subject further addressed below. Thus the roles had been reversed. The very same conditions and circumstance that made Conrad less than suitable as a potential husband for Emilie Briquel, most important of these detractors his being a Polish noble, made him something of a catch to Jessie George. While Mlle Briquel had been kept in the dark about his origins at first, she must have become aware of them later on in life, since she translated *Almayer’s Folly* into French and must have learned further details of its author, simply based on her interest in his work. Perhaps the romance that had sprung up between herself and Conrad was doomed only because of his shady self-presentation and financial uncertainties. The later revelation of his actual origin and character must not have tarnished her opinion of him overmuch. Their initial

connection had been strong on the very same levels that Conrad could not have felt such a connection between himself and Jessie.

Najder further delineates the basic concerns of the case against Conrad's marriage to Jessie. "The main one is what a sensitive and cultured Pole of aristocratic manners and "gentle birth" saw in a typist of humble origin, one of the many children of a warehouseman and shop-keeper, a girl almost sixteen years younger (she was born 22 February 1873), not well educated or particularly intelligent, or – by Conrad's own account – especially attractive" (*A Chronicle, Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 192). It is possible to read the sketch presented as the negative image of Mlle Briquel, not only in the general spirit of the enterprise, but also in its very basic attributes. Although the choice to marry Jessie seems to have been partly helped along by Emilie's engagement to a doctor, it also seems to be based on the lowest bearable level of the attributes shared among the two women with which Conrad could live on a long-term basis. It is true that he had possibly viewed this marriage as a final anchoring – let us recall that he had lost his moorings not long before – to England and a sense of English decorum. In the long term, he may have been correct, yet the issue of personal – cultural geography was not and could not be solved through marriage.

In Edward Garnett's view, however, the marriage was less than ideal for Conrad, based on his natural disposition. Najder further observes that "it is significant that Garnett tried to dissuade [Conrad] from marriage only after he had met Jessie" (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 193). The evasive generalization that was Conrad's reply to Garnett's concerns then presents a case of severe detachment combined with a sense of self-sacrifice. Having spoken of grasping "the truth ... that one's own personality is only a ...

masquerade of something hopelessly unknown” seems to indicate an attitude of resignation. Yet, that resignation is quickly replaced with anger at his lot: “If we are “ever becoming – never being” then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know well that I never will be anything. I would rather grasp the solid satisfaction of my wrong-headedness and shake my fist at the idiotic mystery of Heaven” (Garnett 46). His never being “anything” seems indicative of a blow in self-esteem where social hierarchies are concerned. This had probably come from a realization that rejection would be the answer from Emillie Briquel, or an outright experience of having been rejected by her, whose social position was superior to his. Whether a reality or through implication of her becoming engaged to another, Conrad had been dealt a blow, yet one that angered him in the overarching scheme of things. Simply said, he would not be defeated, rather becoming this than that. That anger most likely led him to a hasty decision.

His proposal of marriage to Jessie, and later justification to Jessie’s mother of the speed with which he wanted to conclude the deed, seem to indicate a profound sense of despair and, perhaps, a physical externalization of his interior sense of self. It may be significant that, as Jessie writes in her first memoir, “a horrified glance at Conrad discovered on his [face] the same expression of acute suffering” as she had caught of herself in “a shop window” as they rode in a hansom following his proposal. “It was surely a strange proposal of marriage. He had begun by announcing that he had not long to live and no intention of having children; but such as his life was ... he thought we might spend a few happy years together” (*Joseph Conrad as I knew Him* 104-105). So it would seem that Conrad may have showed Jessie the turmoil which had been roiling

within him about marriage, yet which was eventually quashed by his angry determination. It also seems that he had attempted to mask that turmoil with talk of his health, a convenient, if unpleasant, reality following his African illness. Still, Jessie's mother reportedly stated ““that she didn't quite see why he wished to get married”” perhaps sensing Conrad's ambivalence toward the enterprise, an ambivalence which seems to come through Jessie's account as well (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* 105).

In her second memoir, Jessie shifts the story away from her mother and places the justifications Conrad presented as his having done it within the space of the same conversation during which the proposal itself took place. The spirit, however, remains the same. She reports his initial pronouncement and further down the page – a page much more polished and verbose than her first recollection had been—presents the finer points.

“Look here, my dear, we had better get married and out of this. Look at the weather. We will get married at once and get over to France. How soon can you be ready? In a week—a fortnight?”

I did not pretend that I was at all surprised, or that his haste disturbed me. In fact, I felt that the sooner the better if at all. [...] All the points in favor of haste he put forward, such as the weather, his health, his work. He even urged as a further inducement that he would not live long. (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 12)

It seems that the end of his sea-going life, the death of his uncle, and the impossibility of a continued courtship with Emilie Briquel – or, as Jocelyn Baines writes that “[i]t is just possible, and this is the merest conjecture, that he had wanted to marry Marguerite Poradowska and been refused” – had all added up to a sense of dying, whether spiritually or physically, or both” (Baines 171). The malaria he had contracted in the Congo had quite probably also played a role in his awareness of life's fragility and may have

predisposed him to view it as quite short, even more so than his experiences at sea and watching his parents die at a young age must have.

Yet, Edward Said points out that “[i]t was very possibly to guard against the ravages of absurdity that earlier on December 20, 1893, [...], Conrad had decided to settle down” (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 25-6). Such a decision would then direct Conrad’s behavior toward any woman he may have deemed marriageable during the following two years. And still it would not have dispelled the general notion that he had chosen someone not wholly suited to him in temperament or education. Then perhaps it had been attraction; his calling her “plain” in visage seems to indicate otherwise. This assessment is, however, contradicted by Ian Watt’s observation that “a photograph of the period shows a plumply attractive, well-dressed and poised young woman” (Watt 70). Whichever of these reasons may or may not be valid, it seems likely that Conrad had wanted to settle within the English fold and to attempt a life other than he had thus far led, one which would be rooted in place as much as possible. A wife, whether a Mlle Briquel or Jessie George, would facilitate such an enterprise by the virtue of her existence. In Jessie’s case, his roots would necessarily be sunk into an English soil and so solidify his standing as an English author. With Emilie Briquel, or for that matter M. Poradowska, he would have to make arrangements not to be “exiled” from the British Isles through marriage and from his readership – as sparse as this may have been at that time – by the sheer force of alienating dislocation. Let us not forget that he was a virtual unknown and that to be writing aboard a British ship while in the British merchant service must have been perceived quite favorably when we consider the subjects of his fiction. To write the type of fiction he had following his marriage from France would

necessarily have had a less positive impact had he married a French woman instead of Jessie.

Although Watt argues that Jessie “was not particularly intelligent, sensitive, or educated; there was no question of her providing Conrad with a base in English society, much less with any intellectual or literary rapport,” it seems that the mark for which Conrad must have been aiming was hit through the act of marrying her just the same (Watt 71). She may not have provided him with much of any but physical support and yet his connection to England and Englishness must have been reinforced by her. Still, Jessie herself was not insensate to some fundamental differences between them. In her first memoir, she not only pointed out that “Conrad was the first foreigner I had ever known intimately” but also suspected that there were some among his friends who did not approve of their union (*Joseph Conrad as I knew Him* 101). She writes:

[...] I must myself have felt dimly from the first that there were good reasons why Conrad’s friends should have dreaded marriage for him. [...] for him the hazard of marriage was so great for another reason. Few people could hope to understand him sufficiently to be happy in constant contact with a nature so charming, yet often hyper-sensitive and broodingly reserved. As one friend says, one always felt that there was a depth within him that after even years of the closest friendship, one had not reached. (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* 3)

It seems only natural that the discussion should center on Conrad’s reasons for marriage and that so many biographers and scholars have not looked too favorably upon Conrad’s choice to marry her. Jessie also seems to have had some misgivings about the enterprise and it seems to be the allure of Conrad’s personality, the charm of a sailor of noble birth, or maybe the promise of seeing the world as an adventure with him, rather than through

his books, that may have attracted her enough to go through with the relationship. Those motives, however, would not be enough to keep her from developing a certain attitude as their relationship progressed and, especially, once Conrad had passed away.

For his part, in marrying her Conrad may actually have succeeded in banishing some of “the ravages of absurdity” after all. This did not mean that he had joined with a like-minded companion who may have been interested in his thought and writing in actuality and in whose work he may have been interested in turn. Success on a social or material level may have come to him at a price. In Najder’s assessment “[t]he burden of loneliness did not disappear, it only changed its shape” (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 195).

A strange case of corroboration of Najder’s assertion can be found in Jessie’s second memoir, *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*. Writing in response to Edward Garnett’s reaction to the impending marriage, she states:

His objections, I learned afterwards, were not all personal to me, but he had formed a very just and complete understanding of the strange character who sought to bind himself in the bonds of matrimony to a woman not even of his own race and so many years younger. (17)

It must be noted that the statement was written with a remove of time nearly as great from Conrad’s death as was the pair’s difference in age. This fact indicates that nearly forty years had passed before Jessie committed these recollections to the page.

Nevertheless, some basic attitudes can quite easily be discerned. The anger that may have accompanied Jessie’s response lies hidden behind a culturally constructed veil of remove. She thus becomes the judge of what had gone on, an attitude that will be addressed in

further detail. We read that the English woman whom Conrad was to marry perceived herself as being of a different race from him. It seems that the light in which we must see the divide between the pair's backgrounds takes on greater meaning than it may have had in actuality. One must also recall the old European concept of race, perhaps derived from ancient tribal and linguistic structures, which refers not to the color of skin only, but to national heritage and linguistic group. In the light of this concept, Joseph Conrad was indeed of a different race from the English just as much as a German is of a different race from a Pole. More importantly, as a Pole, Conrad was not of the same, but of a competing cultural geography.

It is assumed that national, cultural, and linguistic differences are also reflected in the genetic makeup of each 'race' and so constitute a greater distinction than we in America today are trained to recognize. Thus racism must also take on an added meaning and the popular label of "nationalism" necessarily gains a racial aspect. It must be mentioned that even in today's Europe "issues of race" do not necessarily refer to conflicts between peoples of different skin color, but rather most often to what Americans would call 'cultural' or 'ethnic' differences. Thus Jessie had chosen to use the popular term of her time to distinguish between her Englishness and the foreignness of Conrad; he was, after all, a mere Pole, that is a Slav, and therefore not of the West, but rather somewhat Oriental in the same manner that Russia and Russians were oriental to the English mind. One might assume that after having been married to the man for over two decades and having had children they had raised together, Jessie could have avoided this form of stereotyping. Yet, she had no reason and, as it is explained above, the idea of "race" was and seems to remain quite different among Europeans from that perceived by

American culture. Slavs were, at that time, considered not only of a different, but also of an inferior race in the West of Europe and, perhaps as a consequence, in America as well. This fact only made Conrad's issues of identity more complicated, since his idea of Slavdom was closely tied to Russia, thus to those who had oppressed his nation and family, and caused the death of his parents. It then seems more than conjecture to state the opinion that Jessie used race to alienate Conrad from herself and her memories, perhaps as payback for Garnett's alarm upon meeting her.

She certainly seemed to be much more understanding in her previous memoir.

I have a firm conviction that for a long time before his death he felt the call of his native land – though he was as good an “Englishman” as any born and bred, as loyal to her interests and as devoted to the English people. But I have always felt very strongly his dual nationality. (*Joseph Conrad as I knew Him* 16)

The passage seems contemporary in spirit and language. Only observation and experience is used here, and it is this experience from which seems to spring an understanding of Conrad's character. The remove of less than two years between his death and the publication of this memoir may have had an impact on what it contains. Their relationship had just ended with his death when she began writing. She had not yet reevaluated her memories or had had time to move past them and on into a once-again insular existence among the people of her own milieu, that is, into the socio-cultural geography of her birth. His friends had not yet disappeared from the horizon and thus she still must have been fond enough of her dead husband and their life together. Yet, once loneliness set in and enough time had passed, Jessie's judgmental edge showed itself in

her latter book. She seems to have grown more embittered about her life's experience. Although Jessie may have understood that Conrad "held tenaciously to Poland's Western temperament, traditions and culture being altogether removed from Slavism, except geographically" and that "[h]is apprehensions about the critics were realised to some extent – to my regret," she managed to perpetrate those same attitudes. (*Joseph Conrad as I knew Him* 56-7). Still, the marriage must have been full of excitement at its outset for her. Despite that excitement, the difference in age and their divergent cultural geographies were bound to remain issues of concern during their life together. Conrad was bound to remain the 'other', or foreigner, in the marriage, with the notable exception of the time the couple spent in Poland and Austria during the onset of the Great War. Those months spent on the mainland do not seem, however, to equalize the couple's divergent geographies. Rather, because of the episodic manner in which Conrad viewed life, those personal geographies would always remain provisional and be reconfigured to maintain a personal, rather than communal, provisional equilibrium. The fact that the couple had settled in England on a permanent basis favored a more stable personal geography – one about which she did not have to think much, since it was a given to her as an Englishwoman. And while England may also have been beneficial for Conrad's provisional geography, it presented him with a perpetual status as someone who, despite his accomplishments, would always remain just ever so slightly outside of the norm.

II.

The loneliness of shipboard life that he had been accustomed to during the previous two decades was replaced by a new type of isolation. The Conrads rented a house on an island, where the scenery was less than inviting and the only way to get to a town was by a narrow causeway. According to Jessie, they had also rented a small sailboat, which they used to commute to the town at times.

Conrad was making friends in the literary circles as best he could from his newly acquired position as a novelist. From the coast of Brittany, where the newlyweds had retreated for a prolonged honeymoon, he wrote to a critic for the *Saturday Review* upon that author's article regarding *Almayer's Folly*. This critic turned out to be H.G. Wells and thus began a friendship between the two authors. During the following year, he met Henry James and Stephen Crane, and in 1898, following the birth of Borys Conrad, he met Ford Madox Ford. Thus Conrad's associations became ever more literary and more in line with Garnett's assessment of his temperament.

That temperament revealed itself in his literary production during this time and included many short stories, the most important of those to the focus here being *Amy Foster*. He had also written the preface now considered one of his most important manifestos on style: that to the *Nigger of the Narcissus*. The two pieces are obviously different in their aim and genre, yet the latter speaks to the former on issues of stylistic and audience reception. And it is audience that confounded and bewildered Conrad for the majority of his writing life. With the necessarily divergent responses he was to receive from Jessie and F.M. Ford, for example, it must have been difficult to gauge a

more general public's reception of his work. It is important to note the differences in the manner of how admiration and an overriding sense of ownership, or superiority, may have played a role in the two aforementioned readers of his work. Where Ford is concerned, the collaboration Conrad undertook with him on *The Inheritors* seems to include less of his writing sensibility and effort than Ford's.

During the following years, Conrad wrote many of his most celebrated and criticized works, while receiving much recognition for the effort, coupled with rather limited financial rewards. His financial struggle was ongoing well until the 1914 publication of his first commercial success with the novel *Chance*. Meanwhile, his attention turned away from the sea and the Orient and toward political issues. *Lord Jim* may have been his first book-length attempt at exploring the issues of character that would manifest themselves more fully in *Under Western Eyes*, while *Nostramo* sought to transpose such issues onto the imaginary landscape of Costaguana. It wasn't until *The Secret Agent* that Conrad tackled issues of the cultural differences between Eastern and Western European ideologies and practices on a large scale.

Meanwhile his family life grew in size with the birth of his second son, John, in 1906, and in sheer physical difficulty, with Jessie injuring both knees in a bad fall two years earlier. Still, Conrad's financial affairs were anything but tidy and the family required more to maintain than he could earn through his writing. Thus, by the time he had finished writing *Under Western Eyes*, the debts to his agent, J.B. Pinker, had grown to upwards of £ 2000. This fact alone was enough to strain their relationship which had been growing tenser throughout Conrad's writing of the book, which had begun in late 1907. His numerous miscalculations as to the projected length and plot, as well his

countless interruptions of the writing, either by side projects or due to illness, truly strained Pinker's patience and wallet. Conrad's pleas for advances and loans only compounded the issue. The children's and parents' illnesses required more care and funds than he could earn outright, despite a grant of £500 from the Royal Bounty Fund. At the same time, he had interrupted his work on the novel that would become his commercial success, perhaps because the issues that the story then dubbed "Razumov" brought up for him were ever more pressing and closer to his heart. This can be attributed to his return to the Swiss clinic where he had first retreated in 1890, after his bout of malaria contracted during his Congo assignment. Or, perhaps, it was because Switzerland was the place where he had first become fascinated by Scottish engineers and their character in relation to the world. The spark of becoming something other than a Pole under the rule of Russia had then ignited. Or, still again, it was the memory of his last stay at Champel-les-Bains that had sparked a need in him to interrupt work on *Chance* and to concentrate on all the subjects that were somehow associated with this suburb of Geneva and the country of Switzerland for him. This was the place, after all, where he had last been a man free of familial obligations and where his financial difficulties and issues of identity – revealed in his passing himself off as English – were his own. His personal geography was indeed provisional and, although plagued by practical challenges, he was free to choose any course of action he may have deemed fit.

The clinic held for him, in other words, many memories. Once back in England and shortly after his fiftieth birthday, Conrad began work on "Razumov." Whichever of his motivations, conscious or subconscious, presented the impetus to do so, the book would become a confluence of many subjects. Some of these could not fit in a work of

fiction and, since he was not disposed to employ his fictions to further political or biographical purposes, and upon a request from F.M. Ford for biographical sketches to be included in his new publication *The English Review*, he also delved into a series of essays about Poland and his past. The two activities seem to run simultaneously for reasons beyond the needs of the pocketbook or requests from friends, as will be explored in later chapters.

III.

The writing of the two volumes, *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*, took its toll on Conrad. As with the culmination of any major project, and perhaps more so in the case of this novel, he must have experienced a sense of elation upon the completion of its initial full draft. When he went to London to deliver the manuscript to his agent, J.B. Pinker, he must have felt a different type of tension from that which had accompanied its writing. As Jessie states, “Joseph Conrad was Joseph Conrad” and this presented issues in and of itself (*Joseph Conrad as I knew Him* 134). The personal geography Conrad had created for himself was necessarily provisional and so needed consistent conditions in order to be maintained. His family life provided some points of anchorage, yet those could not have been enough to maintain something so complex and ever-changing as an exile’s sense of self in relation to a larger society. He was dependent on memory and his command of language, especially the written form. In writing *Under Western Eyes*, he had invested some of the experiences he had not previously revealed on

the page. The effort was then doubled through his writing of the reminiscences, an exercise that allowed him to be more open, if still stylized and guarded, about his past with the readership. The pages that resulted seem to have helped maintain his provisional-personal geography, yet also caused it to be much more exposed to outside influences than his sea stories were. In short, the elation of having finished a manuscript draft made him more volatile and less guarded against outside criticism, whether the latter had been intentional attacks or not.

Upon delivering the “finished and typed (but uncorrected) text of *Under Western Eyes*,” an altercation between Pinker and Conrad sent the author into a kind of tailspin, resulting in three months of illness (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 357). In her first memoir, Jessie describes the condition as being “very ill” and notes that he “rambled all the time in his native tongue” (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* 136-7). In her latter recollections, she elaborates upon her husband’s condition somewhat, but most especially puts herself in the driver’s seat and directs the doctors who were taking care of him, generally giving herself credit for Conrad’s survival. Her descriptions run the gambit of his throat having swollen to twice its regular size to portraying him as having lost the capacity of regular speech, except “for a few fierce sentences against poor J.B. Pinker.” Otherwise he “lay with his eyes closed and his arms folded, repeating snatches of orders in an Eastern language” (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 143). And again she asserts that “he lay on his back, faintly murmuring the words of the burial service” (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 144). Thus within the space of a few pages, Jessie has asserted several competing facts. If she indeed heard him giving orders and speaking in an Eastern language, then perhaps the burial service was also in that language, as were the

invocations against Pinker. What seems rather intriguing is Jessie's insistence on calling Conrad's speech "an Eastern language" as a catchall method of relating what she heard. It is probable that Conrad spoke mostly Polish, while it is also possible that he indeed used a language from the shipboard. To Jessie, however, the catch-all phrase of "Eastern language" seems to have encompassed all those possibilities, thus lumping together all languages that were not English under a label that could double for that of "Oriental".

Regardless of the truth of the episode, it seems clear that Conrad had indeed taken very ill after his meeting. It was during the latter part of this illness that he is supposed to have edited the book's manuscript to, more or less, its published version. Much speculation remains as to whether he had cut nearly thirty thousand words from the original finished manuscript, despite several comparative studies. What is certain is that he did not throw it on the fire as he had threatened prior to its completion and, according to Jessie once again, as she had feared that he would during his illness.

The novel was published in October of 1911 in England and, two weeks later, in America. Though the reviews were largely favorable, it did not sell very well on either market. It wasn't until a Russian translation became available in pre-revolutionary Russia that it reached a wider audience, albeit one for which it reportedly was not intended. The personal essays Conrad wrote for *The English Review* were then collected and published during January of the following year in a volume named *Some Reminiscences* in England and *A Personal Record* in America.

Conrad had meanwhile resumed work on *Chance* and finished a draft in March of 1912. In 1913, he began work on *Victory* and was introduced by Pinker to "F.N. Doubleday, who [suggested] a collected edition of [Conrad's] work" (Knowles and

Moore xxxv). The following January, *Chance* was published in England and that March in America. In June, Conrad finished a draft of *Victory*. It appears as if he had been rid of the demons that had possessed him during the period of writing *Under Western Eyes* and could resume his creative efforts with greater speed and efficiency. What appears to be a likely cause for his renewed vigor is not the Russian novel itself, but that he had managed to keep in check most of the psychological forces behind his *homo-duplex* syndrome through the writing process that culminated in his breakdown and the book's publication. What remained to him at its completion must have been the knowledge that he could withstand the assault upon his provisional identity, even when it came from some of his closest acquaintances. He had managed to pull through it, if scathed. The consensus of the literary community that *Under Western Eyes* had marked the end of his peak creative period notwithstanding, he was still able to create. Perhaps his works were no longer plagued to such an obvious degree by issues of identity. Yet, *Chance* and *The Arrow of Gold* certainly seem to contain enough material to counter that assertion. The subjects are indeed present within those volumes, but are explored in a new manner and with a different set of eyes from those previous. Yet, commercial success has a way of casting a shadow over any writer's merit and so with the beginning of Conrad's may have come that very same suspicion from the literary community. It may have been corroborated by the way that Conrad's surrogate in *Chance*, Charlie Marlow, is handled with a heavy hand. To compound the case, *The Arrow of Gold* provides ample fodder to critics who like to subscribe to the Waning Powers theory. Still, it is entirely likely that with a crucial aspect of his impetus to write safely deposited between the covers of two volumes, and his continued survival, Conrad had returned to fiction with a new purpose.

IV.

During the summer of 1914, with his newfound commercial success, Conrad returned to Poland with Jessie and his sons. As luck would have it, the Great War broke out while they were in Krakow, stranding the family behind ‘enemy’ lines for nearly three months. Conrad must have felt well enough established in both his status as an English novelist and within the English society as well to bring his family to the place of his origin. As Baines observes, “he had at last reached the position of being a successful as well as an important writer. His visit was therefore in the nature of a triumphal homecoming” (*Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* 400). An invitation extended by the Retingers was probably the final impetus which set Conrad in motion. Their original plan for seeing the countryside had turned into an exercise in avoidance and flight instead. Unable to travel out of the country – Krakow was then under the Austrian crown, and so at war with Russia, which put the family at greater risk by the sheer proximity of its border – the Conrads sought refuge in the town of Zakopane, on the Polish side of the Tatra mountains. When it became obvious that the war would go on and that the situation would continue to draw in more nations, leading to a possible commencement of hostilities between Austria and England (the United Kingdom declared war on Austria on August 12), they sought passage out of occupied Poland and managed to obtain train passes to Vienna. From there, with much help from the American Ambassador to Austria, they obtained permission to travel to the Italian frontier. Luckily enough, they were

allowed through the Austrian border before the knowledge of a decree to detain Conrad and family was known by the guards.⁷

Jessie describes the stay at Zakopane and the meandering trip back to England in somewhat harrowing tones. She heroically found medicine for Conrad's gout at a Viennese pharmacy, despite her inability to speak German and the pharmacists' unwillingness to speak English. She and Borys tracked down the luggage that had been lost on the way from Berlin to Krakow. It is not surprising that she would have perceived their situation as grave, and yet act in a manner that displayed the best of her abilities, especially in the story she had recreated for herself and her readership at a later date. There can be no doubt that the family faced a degree of danger on 'enemy' territory. Perhaps the greatest danger lay in misunderstandings and bureaucratic incompetence. One need only look at Franz Kafka's *The Trial* for an explanation of what such a scenario could look like. Perhaps it is a stretch, as Najder argues, that Conrad could have been completely fluent in German or that a German guard was actually stationed at the border post between Austria and Italy. The descriptions of the incident by Jessie and Borys are both written from the point of view of persons unable to distinguish a German from an Austrian, or, for that matter, a Sudeten German who would also have been in the service of the Austrian monarchy, by dialect, let alone understand what is being said. Therefore we must perceive their reportage as honest to the best of their abilities. Even then, the descriptions differ. In *Joseph Conrad as I knew Him*, Jessie writes that:

⁷ The accounts of the confrontation with a border guard differ as do the reports on a general order to detain the family. Najder writes that they left Vienna "[a]fter receiving an assurance from the police commissioner that there were no official objections to their crossing the Austrian border [...] On the twentieth they were in Italy, which was still neutral" (*A Chronicle*, 403). Yet, one might consider the Austrian bureaucratic machine in this equation and conclude that the very order for their detention lay on the same commissioner's desk and that he had simply not yet taken a look at it.

Never shall I forget standing in the rain when we reached the frontier and watching Conrad's face. He was positively ashen; then he suddenly launched out into German – a language he had not spoken since he was a tiny boy. The official, who obviously was quite ignorant of what he was looking at, fingered our papers, adopting a knowing air, and, blessed relief, allowed us to go. (90)

whereas the account of the very same incident is described by Borys Conrad in the following manner in his memoir, *My Father Joseph Conrad*.

My father had always insisted that he could only speak a few words of German, however, in this emergency, it seemed to me that he spoke at considerable length and with great fluency, but the only effect this had on the Prussian was to cause him to lose his temper and start shouting at us. (97)

It is clear that not only is the identification of the “official’s” nationality in some doubt, but that the incident itself follows divergent outcomes. Although it may be likely that Conrad had not spoken German since leaving Krakow, Jessie’s designation of his age at that time as having been “a tiny boy” seems grossly misleading. If he indeed had left Krakow at the age of 17 and Krakow was then under Austrian administration, the likelihood that Conrad would have had to speak German for official purposes at that point of his life is high. Not only during the time of his voluntary leaving of Austrian Poland, but also afterwards, along his way to France which led through Vienna, the probability that he had spoken passable German becomes a certainty. While Austrian Poland would have had German and Polish as its legal languages, the Austrian metropolis of Vienna would not have had the same requirement and Polish would not have been used for legal

purposes.⁸ The accounts of this flight from Austria differ in that Borys complicates the matter with either clearer recollection of the moment or else a greater bit of the imagination. Yet, his account seems less predisposed to haughtiness and judgment, and so it is more likely that it is recalled with greater accuracy.

It is curious that in *Joseph Conrad and His Circle* Jessie glosses over the border crossing episode with chatter concerning the types of passengers and her interactions with them instead. It seems that this chatter serves to cover over an extremely uncomfortable episode. Perhaps the sudden change of personality that must have been implicit in Conrad's linguistic conduct was too confusing for Jessie and perhaps for Conrad's sense of self at once. Let us assume that the final outcome is the same as that documented by others and evidenced by the Conrads finally crossing into Italy and arriving in England in early November.

V.

Conrad's return to Poland yielded the essay "Poland Revisited." It was the result of F.N. Doubleday's request, on behalf of the *Saturday Evening Post*, for "some war articles written by Conrad" after his return from "being trapped" behind enemy lines (Knowels and Moore 318). Though the essay was turned down by the *Post* in America, it was published in Britain by the *Daily News Leader* in installments dated March 29 and

⁸ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine Austrian officials at their main government seat speaking all the languages of their empire or signs being posted in multiple languages as well. The lingua franca of the Hapsburgs was German and all others, unless directly within the empire's district that had a native tongue other than German, would have to conform to its supremacy, especially in Vienna.

31, and April 6 and 9, 1915. And it was also published in America in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in three parts, dated “3,10, and 17 April 1915” (Knowels and Moore 318). In its complete and revised version, it was then published in *Notes on Life and Letters* in 1920. Perhaps it also served further to divert his energies from attempting to explain his origins and current stance in relation to Poland as opposed to being an Englishman. In other words, it may have forced him to recalibrate his personal geography and see himself in a new stance where his persona was concerned. In the closing lines of the essay, Conrad recalls their ship’s entry “into the estuary of the Thames” and “the boom of the big guns at work on the coast of Flanders” the sound that rather “was ... a shock” and “found its way straight into my heart” (*NLL* 173). Following what seems to be the most personal and open of his reminiscences, the fact of his adoptive homeland’s involvement in a war on the opposing side of which lay caught his native soil, strikes at the heart of Conrad’s predicament. In order to bridge the divide that in times of peace had been difficult enough to bridge because of misunderstood cultural geographies, he would have had to work against the dehumanizing drives of nationalist tendencies in time of war. That perhaps is the reason for his candor in “Poland Revisited.” The recalibration of his personal geographies is also evident within the lines, in that his heart, rather than a skeptic’s reliance on empirical information with which it is imbued, is invoked, thus pledging allegiance to his England. With the recalibration of cultural allegiances in order to better translate between these two personal geographies, Conrad seems to have begun a private campaign to benefit Poland. He used his energies to support Polish independence and the aims and needs of his adoptive England at the same time.

To such ends, his 1916 memorandum, submitted to the Foreign Office on August 15, 1916, “A Note on the Polish Problem,” first made public through a private printing in 1919 and republished in *Notes on Life and Letters* in 1920, showcases Conrad’s knowledge of the situation and understanding of Eastern and Western mentalities. The article was suggested to Conrad by Jozef H. Retinger and shares the thrust of its argument with Retinger’s, French-language memorandum of 1915 on Polonism and Europe. Conrad’s policy recommendations within those pages are as close to the eventual outcome as possible. (Very similar steps were taken by the Western Powers in the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia and yielded positive results for the duration of the interwar period. Though, as with Czechoslovakia, Poland’s territory was staked out too close to Russia and her interests. The effects of this were felt following the interwar period.)

Conrad perceives Poland as “[t]hat advanced outpost of Western civilisation” and in spite of an overt messianic tone to the pronouncement, he is correct, though his view is overly reductive (*NLL* 138). Because of pre-partition Poland’s geographical boundaries, it was the eastern-most federalized and religiously tolerant state in Europe. As Joseph Rothschild writes in *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*:

[Poland’s] political principles had required neither linguistic nor ethnic uniformity: Latin was the language of state functions, and caste rather than race was the criterion of access into the ruling establishment. ... Thus, at a time when the rest of Europe had been convulsed by the post-Reformation religious wars and persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Poland had enjoyed the widest degree of religious toleration and freedom of any state on the continent. (27)

It was this Poland that Conrad's upbringing had instilled in his consciousness and the very same that he urged his readership to support at the war's conclusion. Yet, he did also see such a state as "[a]n Anglo-French protectorate" and the two western powers as providing Poland with "moral and material support" (*NLL* 138). Much of what he proposed in closing did not, however, materialize, and Poland was plagued by border wars until 1923, internal political conflicts, and was finally overrun by the two powers of Germany and Russia – which had historically posed the greatest danger to it and which Conrad distrusted as would any self-respecting Pole or Central European – at the beginning of the Second World War.⁹

VI.

Following these essays, Conrad's efforts seem to have turned well away from his earlier attempts at a type of autobiography veiled from direct view. Autobiography had not then been the actual aim, but rather the states of existence he had experienced and the effects these states produced had been the subjects for his fictions. The experiences occasioned by being outside the norm, perhaps, or even in explaining the norm, were always pitted against that norm as the "other" or extraordinary. It would be easy to point out that such a phenomenon is common in our twenty-first century culture or that there isn't anything but "other" present to any modern individual. Yet, during Conrad's time these notions of the exotic and oriental were very much a reality for the settled, non-

⁹ For a closer look at Conrad's thoughts on Prussia (Germany) and Russia see his essay *Autocracy and War*.

cosmopolitan populations of England and the English speaking world. They translated well into French or Russian, since most countries possessed local cultures that were not barraged by information from the outside and the ideas that are necessarily brought about by seeing differing ways of normative conduct. Therefore, it had been Conrad's aim to "make you see" that which was not apparent (*NN* xiv).

When he had turned his attention to *Under Western Eyes* and confessed just enough about his earlier life, the act seems to have ushered in a different stage of life. This stage included a shift in the thrust of his fiction. Perhaps with his newfound standing as a popular as well as a literary writer, and with the revelations, embellished as they were, published in the volume *A Personal Record*, he felt more at ease with his Polishness and well enough rooted in England to need no longer such elaborate authorial veils as Marlow or the Teacher of Languages. He concentrated his energy on telling stories culled from his youthful years, such as *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Shadow Line*, the latter of which was nearly autobiographical outright.

It is possible to attribute this new direction to a waning of his creative powers. Though it seems more likely that Conrad's interests had simply diverged from the course he had previously maintained, just as they had led him away from writing *Chance* and driven him toward the completion of *Under Western Eyes* first. Thus, it is the subject of the self that is at work within the writer, consciously or subconsciously, that seems to have driven Conrad's creative efforts. Rather than making popular or literary fictions from snippets of information gained in papers and through impressionistic observations of his surroundings of the time, he had retreated toward his youth and subjects that were dear to him on a personal level. And although he had tried to enshroud some of those

subjects in a further layer of mystery in his correspondence with Pinker, as several biographers have noted, the grain of truth that lends credence to misinformation must be contained even in those efforts.

Conrad's later years were spent in various pursuits of dramatizing his works and attempting to produce works based on a set of interests no longer of quite the same type as had been employed earlier. According to Baines, he wrote "one of the worst passages" of his entire career in *The Arrow of Gold*:

Woman and the sea revealed themselves to me together, as it were: two mistresses of life's values. The illimitable greatness of the one, the unfathomable seduction of the other working their immemorial spells from generation to generation fell upon my heart at last; a common fortune, an unforgettable memory of the sea's formless might and of the sovereign charm in that woman's form wherein there seemed to beat the pulse of divinity rather than blood. (88)

While the passage is convoluted enough, it also reveals the basic sentiments of a young M. George – a character modeled on Conrad's youthful experiences in Marseilles – toward both sea and Rita de Lastola, his love interest and the center around which the novel seems to revolve. The cliché comparing Rita to the sea has vague overtones of Odysseus and the Sirens. And, of course, the divinity of the sea itself, the "formless might," could refer only to Poseidon. The combination of these necessarily brings the reader to understand that this is not just any ordinary love story among commoners, but rather an elevated, albeit somewhat sterile, story of nobility (never mind Rita's origins) in their essence. In the initial comparison, however, we find the mechanism obvious, if we discount the text that surrounds it. The buildup to this point is only partially

comprehensible and its sufficiently confusing effect allows for an atmosphere that makes such a passage possible. It is only the kernel of the story, the impressions that it provides, and an atmosphere within which the characters move that hold the reader. It may be the very same elements that hold the writer's attention as well.

A story based within his fictionalized life in Marseilles might just indicate that the writer had not only wanted to utilize his memories as material for fiction, but also had wanted to relive them. He may have found the experience of "otherness" contained in this tale necessary to reveal somehow, but this particular type of experience is more common to books of intrigue and suspense than *Under Western Eyes* or *Lord Jim*. The impetus seems to point in the direction of memory. Conrad, after all, had lived a life rich in impressions of many cultures and places, and may have been filled with these enough to continue working for another twenty years. He did not need to reach outside of his storehouse for new material, though he is known to have researched his later efforts and utilized other's material within them. Such efforts, however, were usually meant to enhance aspects of a story he seemed to have fixated upon and to lend that story further authenticity. In the case of *The Rover* and *Suspense*, his Napoleonic novels, the impetus had probably been a fascination with the Mediterranean, as well as with the role played by Napoleon in relation to Poland's sovereignty. Conrad's interests coincided here: on the one hand he was writing about a setting of his younger days, while on the other he explored a time that must have been integral within the scope of his socio-cultural geography during his upbringing.

The sources of his writing during the later years may also have made it difficult to review typed copy or work diligently on each line of manuscript. Once he had expressed

the memory and fictionalized it onto a page, he may not have had further need of it. He had lived it again and that may have been sufficient for him. Craftsmanship fell by the wayside in some instances and the result can be discerned in the paragraph quoted above from *The Arrow of Gold*.

VII.

Toward the close of his life, Conrad was increasingly plagued by physical discomfort and depression (Najder). These immobilized him for long stretches and slowed much of his work on *Suspense*, which was compiled by Richard Curle and published posthumously. Najder asserts that “[w]ith age Conrad became obsessively anxious about money—a trait common among elderly people, and typical among victims of depression” (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 453). The two factors, age and depression, must have also been compounded by the general situation of his life. His wife was unable to walk and was of a temperament too unlike his own. Though she may have been a good administrator of helpers, she herself could at this stage do little caretaking of him on her own. Secondly, his physical symptoms usually followed some form of mental exertion, which in turn probably engendered psychic exhaustion. A progression of this sort was bound to produce a bout of depression. His adoptive homeland did not readily accept his character, except as a curiosity. “He had remained an outsider in England, but over the course of many difficult years the fortitude he needed to bear his own isolation finally

began to fail him,” according to Najder (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 452). As Jessie notes,

I understood my husband so much better after those months in Poland. So many characteristics that had been strange and unfathomable to me before, took, as it were, their right proportions. I understood that his temperament was that of his countrymen. (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* 68)

Jessie’s pronouncement does not seem to yield the necessary basis for amelioration of Conrad’s loneliness. She may have understood the temperament of her husband a bit better after their “months in Poland.” Yet, this understanding seems to be based upon stereotypes of hospitality rather than on comprehension gained through personal interaction on an equal footing. She had seen the reaction of the Poles to the situation brought about by a war and their efforts at normalizing life for their guests. What lay beneath that surface must have been next to impossible to discern with her inability to speak the language or to be initiated into the native cultural geographies of everyday Polish life. Therefore Conrad became the stereotypical Pole to her. Still, the stereotype to which Jessie could refer was one in a state of war, that is, one reacting to an imminent threat and in an alarmed state. So, Conrad’s Polish character may have been that of his countrymen under constant threat from without and that was the state in which Jessie seemed to have understood her husband best. What this tells us of Conrad’s personal geography seems to point directly toward Najder’s pronouncement of Conrad’s increasing inability to bear-up under the pressures from without.

The result of Jessie's interpretation of Conrad's character is reflected in the pair's dynamic. Her general attitude toward Conrad and his writing adopts a motherly approach to author and works:

My husband's books were to me as so many children, so to speak, and each in turn should have its place in these recollections. There is attached to one and all some tender remembrance and unforgotten episode. (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* 100)

This passage in particular maintains some semblance to the books that serve as milestones to her recollection of the marriage. The sentiment indicating ownership of his works could in part also be interpreted as her owning the memories associated with them. It is in the end of her second memoir, however, that Jessie seems to go on the offensive against any and all critics of her attitudes and conduct regarding Conrad:

Every life that is spent in close contact with another, if it lasts beyond the purely sentimental stage, must contain a fair share of discord. Especially if each is to retain their own individuality—and only in this way can a couple hope to continue life together in mutual respect and esteem. (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 271)

The generalization with its truisms seems to buttress Jessie against reproach, since most who read it must agree that there is difficulty in every long-term relationship. Her stance seems honorable enough. She then follows it with a paragraph in the spirit of women's rights to personality within marriage, which seems to signal to the reader that she is aware of societal trends and probably has heard of writers like Virginia Woolf. In the third paragraph, she continues directly to her marriage:

I had learned during the time we had lived together to value beyond everything Joseph Conrad's truly lovable nature, to admire his genius and to be tolerant of his nervous sensitiveness. Possibly had I been incapable of understanding his exotic nature, we might never have lived in such complete harmony. [...] He has said himself, many times, that he could never have lived with anyone else, and other people who have known him have said the same. (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 271)

It is interesting to what degree Jessie felt it necessary to buttress her argument of their "complete harmony." She brings in the supreme authority of Conrad himself and, perhaps not trusting its effectiveness, the vague "other people who have known him." The latter could be anyone from a grocer to Pinker or Richard Curle. She also manages to label Conrad as being of an "exotic nature," which hints at a diverging trend between their cultural geographies, and must have made it more difficult for her actually to comprehend what was happening within her husband.

Once her narrative moves past Conrad's death, she begins to recount what he had been to her by labels that seem incongruous with equality and mutual respect, as well as with the moniker "my lord and master" she often employs:

He had been to me as much a son as husband. He claimed my care and indulgence in the same manner as the smallest infant would have done. And yet, at the same time, there was that sense of pride in the great achievements, admiration for the volume of work done under difficulties that were unique. In a tongue that was to the end absolutely foreign to him. [...] and each book became like another infant. (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 278)

As has been mentioned previously, Jessie seems to have resented Conrad's abilities beyond her own to maneuver in her native language. Instead of competing directly, she

adopted a motherly attitude toward books and their writer alike. She does not credit him with having assimilated the language of his art. Here, in the epithet to her second volume of remembrances, it seems vindictive of her to state what she does above. She may have been proud of his success, but one must consider the implications of the word 'pride': it connotes the speaker's superior position to that person of whom she expresses the sentiment. Further, she considers herself "the guardian of his memory" which seems to indicate that she is in possession of the only truth regarding Conrad. Both these aspects position Jessie in relation to Conrad as a superior being and a gatekeeper of his truth. No one knew him better or understood him more thoroughly than she. Both of these statements may indeed be true, but their delivery could have been done without the belittling aspects Jessie so thoroughly seems to enjoy. It is in those aspects that one can discern a colonial attitude toward Conrad. Jessie's cultural geography must have been heavily influenced by England's tone toward those it considered British subjects, but not of British origin.

As a curio in English society, Conrad's home life must have been anything but ideal in light of Jessie's attitude toward him. This attitude could only have become more severe as the two aged and Conrad's health deteriorated. Najder writes of "a 'liberating' release in extravagance" when it came to spending money and entertaining (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 453). It must have been through social activities that Conrad could maintain his spirits, because his status as a writer and perhaps as an elder statesman of literature was maintained. It certainly was not through his interactions with his nearly crippled and perhaps acerbic wife that his depression could be warded off.

As Najder notes, “[o]nly rarely did he seek a dialogue or discussion; he would persistently ask for conversation, but the ensuing talk usually consisted of his own monologues” (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 452). The need to have an audience for his monologues, which he may have considered conversation, seems to point to his persistent need to be understood. With his creative powers weakening or becoming impossible to practice without someone to take down his dictation, conversation must have become a form of writing to him. Such form of writing offered what no written works could: an immediate reaction from his companions *cum* audience. Baines states that “[a]lthough writing may have seemed the ideal solution to Conrad’s predicament, in practice it produced only a precarious equilibrium” (*Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* 451). The equilibrium that his writing had maintained seems to have been upheld as much as possible through the combination of socializing, “conversations”, and work on the various stage adaptations and whatever other writing he was able to perform, including *Suspense*. And still depression persisted and must have worsened. The events on the morning of his death as described by Jessie seem to indicate that Conrad’s moods changed very fast right before his passing. Conrad’s final pronouncements are depicted as snippets of his voice calling out: ““You Jess, I am better this morning,”” a short sharp laugh, with a catch in his breath, then a cheerful hail: ““I can always get a rise out of you.”” (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 276). His spirits were dependent on his surroundings, but also on his health. Right before the moment of his death, he must have felt well enough to be actually cheerful.

In July of 1924 Conrad suffered a heart attack, followed by a smaller one a few days later. A major one followed these on August 3, 1924:

He died early on the following morning. Apparently he had got out of bed and was sitting in the armchair from which Mrs. C. heard him fall. She rang the bell, but when his man-servant reached the room he was already dead. (B. Conrad 162)

He was buried on August 7 in the Catholic portion of the Canterbury Cemetery. Of the dates we can be quite certain. The descriptions of his dying do differ quite substantially, however. Perhaps they are proof that memory is indeed episodic, that the impressions a single incident produces in multiple individuals agree only on rudimentary facts, and that Conrad had been right in his aims to immortalize those he had himself experienced or embellished so that others might have the benefit of his viewpoint.

Chapter 2: Under Western Eyes: Critical Assessments and Diagnoses

I: An Excursion into the Center

In 1911, most of Conrad's books to date had been highly acclaimed by critics and writers alike, yet had failed to capture the wide readership and commercial success he needed and seemed to desire. On the one hand, he was considered a great craftsman while on the other his critics always managed to point out some noticeable aspect of his foreignness. One could speculate that the constant reference to his foreign origins may have cost him some of the possible readership that had been available to any other English author of the time through the notion that his handling of the English language was less than natural. The general thrust of the reviews of *Under Western Eyes* upon its publication only served further to reinforce the notion of foreignness in Conrad's linguistic handling. Where the more thorough reviewers point to numerous, detailed aspects of the novel, those writing for more general publications tend to focus on other, more general features. An anonymous reviewer in the *San Jose Mercury and Herald* evaluates Conrad's efforts in positive tones before going on to compare the novel's circumstances to those of Turgenev's novels and positing that "Mr. Conrad's father was a

Russian and the son's long residence in England and his artistic self-detachment renders his Russian characters better understood than are those of writers more exclusively Russian" (Mar. 17, 1912). The reviewer then proceeds to criticize Conrad's lack of understanding of the Russian political situation, in effect stating that it is outdated in the most fundamental ways. That is where the reviewer leaves readers to draw their own conclusions. Though more thorough than might be expected from a local American paper, the review seems to drive a wedge between the book and its prospective readership by effectively calling Conrad's characterization and political analysis anachronistic.

A reviewer for the *Washington Post*, on the other hand, does nothing more than notify the reading public that there indeed is a new novel by Conrad to be purchased, possibly as a Christmas gift. A reviewer for the *Lexington Herald* uses the slim column allotted by that paper to state that:

[T]he author [...] did a fiendish thing but a wonderfully powerful one. [...] The story shows the people of Russia as of morbid endurance and wonderful charm, their stormy souls always reacting upon themselves until the masses can not be called in any sense normal. With all its pain and horror one of Mr. Conrad's stories makes one earnestly desire more. (Dec. 31, 1911: 2)

The morbidity of the final line seems obvious and may have done more to frighten away readers rather than bring them to the booksellers' shelf. It cannot be ascertained which of the possible effects was the one desired by its author, but to speak of "pain and horror" in relation to *Under Western Eyes* seems somewhat exaggerated. Perhaps it is a reaction to

an unfamiliar political and social system or to the facts of Russian exilic existence that is depicted in the novel.

A review published by *The Nation* is more thorough and examines the novel in a comprehensive manner, yet also concludes that “these pages might almost be a translation from the work of some Russian novelist – a version possessing the distinction of style which belongs to all of Mr. Conrad’s writing” (94.2. 2429: 60). Thus the comparison of Conrad’s novel to those of Russian authors begins to take up steam on the American literary scene. The implications for Conrad’s artistic vision are somewhat sweeping, relegating him to a position of a mere translator rather than ‘author’ or point of origin of his writing.

In Britain, the trend to comparison began with some of the earliest reviews. According to an anonymous reviewer for the *Westminster Gazette* “*Under Western Eyes* becomes an explanation of the works of Russian novelists; it helps us understand Turgeniev and Dostoievsky ...; it is a brilliantly successful effort to make the Russian comprehensible to the Westerner.” The comparison did not seem enough to its author, however, who had to impose the following judgment. “That ... is the essence of the book, and it is that which makes it acceptable as a piece of literature which should endure.” Thus in spite of the novel’s other attributes, it becomes the quality of translating the Russian novelists’ works into a package comprehensible to Western European readers which renders the book “acceptable as a piece of literature.” Although the reviewer does conclude on a positive note, the fact that – despite Conrad’s own declaration of a similar intent – the novel becomes something that “must rank with the masterpieces of English

fiction, as a Russian story for Western ears” seems to relegate it to the curiosity shop rather than recommending it to a wider readership, unless that readership is actually interested in the puzzle of Russia (Sherry 234-35).

Where the previous assessment may have been reasonably neutral, despite its implications, others were not as kind. A reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* could not help but deliver the line: “[Conrad] still confuses the preterite with the perfect and often uses the wrong sign of the future.” Though in virtually the same breath, he then calls Conrad’s “gifts as a writer of nervous and polished prose” “remarkable” and “noteworthy here as always” (Sherry 227-28). It is a mixed appraisal of Conrad’s ability as a novelist and does little to endear him to his British readership. The implications of grammar issues and his prose being “nervous” could not have made a great advertising banner.

A comparatively positive assessment was published by the *Morning Post*. Its anonymous author stated that “[*Under Western Eyes*] is constructed with greater ability than Mr. Conrad’s stories usually are; ... here the man in the saddle is in complete mastery, and the result is a perfectly poised work of art” (Sherry 231). The reviewer had noticed the change in Conrad’s style, yet noted it with enough judgment still to favor this novel over the author’s previous longer works. Whether the perceived stylistic change had a positive effect upon the readership is unknown. To have called the novel “a perfectly poised work of art” however could not have made it too palatable to the lower-brow among the paper’s readership, thus creating a different type of barrier between author and reader than a linguistic one. Stated another way: the common reader would not have been put off by Conrad’s foreignness, but rather by the assessment that the novel

was “a work of art” thus signaling something difficult to comprehend. Such a task of attempting to decipher this ‘art’ may have been more than what the average reader was willing to contend with. This would have served to prevent further Conrad’s commercial success. Still, the review concludes with glowing praise for the novel in terms of Conrad’s overall output: “He has never done anything better” (Sherry 233). To not have done anything better, however, still retains the possibility of a double-edged meaning. The review seems perhaps the most positive among those published as initial assessments of the novel. Even so, it does possess reserves that could be interpreted in a negative manner, especially by those who have seen other assessments prior to reading it and have been impacted by that experience.

An unsigned review by Edward Garnett – Conrad’s long time friend and literary influence – published by the *Nation* was not nearly as kind. He pointed out that “[t]here are pages, indeed not a few, where the talk between the characters seems a little strained, or obviously arranged for the particular purpose of drama. But such flaws escape clean from the memory when we reach the last chapter ...” (Sherry 239). Such reported flaws may indeed signal Conrad’s fidelity to translating things Russian while maintaining the types of tensions inherent in the Russians’ social conduct as depicted by Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy. Even though we may indeed forget these flaws – if flaws they may be – in light of the last chapter, it isn’t likely that such an assessment is overly favorable in the eye of the reader and may cause a case of reticence of the wallet. Garnett had also judged the book to be anti-Russian in its overall sentiment, an opinion disputed by Conrad in a letter to Garnett, dated 20 October 1911.

A review written by Richard Curle – a future great friend of Conrad, though they had not yet become acquainted at the time of the article’s publication – and printed in the *Manchester Guardian* took Conrad to be a “great writer” and “creator” but a one “whose creations are beginning to lack energy.” Just as Garnett had done, Curle also compared Conrad’s work to that of Russian writers, yet concentrated mostly on the novel’s relationship to Conrad’s previous works of fiction. Perhaps his review shows a greater desire to root Conrad within the English tradition, if only by the comparison, albeit less than positive, to Henry James (Sherry 229).

Garnett and Curle were not the only writers from Conrad’s circle who commented on the novel publicly. Ford Maddox Ford wrote a rather extensive review upon the occasion and published it in the December 1911 issue of *The English Review*. The falling out that had taken place between the men over Conrad’s refusal to submit any more reminiscences for publication by Ford’s journal seems to have exerted little, if any, influence on Ford’s assessment of the novel and Conrad’s art in general. Though he takes a wide view of Conrad’s literary output, tracing a theme of personal responsibility for one’s transgressions against a code of principles that are just as personal and addressing the issue of honor, his main aim seems to be to situate the new novel within the larger span of Conrad’s literary thought. The more or less glowing review, in which Ford also manages to digress in every direction, pays less attention to the novel at hand than one might wish. He concludes: “if Conrad has not earned any huge material success, he has secured a recognition, even from the more Academic, that few men of his greatness have ever secured in their age and their own day” (*Critical Essays* 90). Despite the reported

falling out between them, Ford's opinion of Conrad's artistry had not been diminished. In a letter dated 21 December, 1911, Conrad expressed his appreciation for the review, calling it "the speech of a friend" (Karl and Davies 525).

What can be gathered from these initial assessments of the novel is that it was deemed a work meant to translate the Russian experience for Western readers. It may also have been a direct translation of Dostoyevsky's work with the stylistic sensibilities of Conrad as the translator and craftsman imposed upon it. Conrad's handling of the English language was at times less than perfect in its grammar and the framework of the story showed more than may have been deemed desirable. The lesser assessments then expressed admiration and horror, based mostly on the events of the story rather than on any artistic considerations. Many of these initial reactions seem to endure throughout later critics' works as well.

Though precious little critical writing followed the initial reception of this novel, Conrad's *Author's Note* to the 1920 edition could be considered as a critical defense of the intent with which he wrote the book. One may also wish to consider it an attempt to guide future critical discussion. In it Conrad seems to distill his aims in writing the book for further critical consideration. Stating that "being as a whole an attempt to render not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself" and that he "had no other object in view than to express imaginatively the general truth which underlies its action" Conrad begins to set in motion the *deus ex machina* of critical thought in general (*UWE* 281). Of course, his own thought about the novel's aims and content had been influenced by the published assessments by that time, many of which he had engaged in letters. Thus

it is difficult to discern whether the *Author's Note* itself is not a reassessment of the book in light of others' opinions and through the lens of hindsight. It does seem to set a critical tone for those who would later examine the work and provides answers to previous critical assessments.

It may be its influence or the influence of previous critics that can be seen in the first major essay to appear three decades later. Morton Dauwen Zabel's introduction to the 1951 Doubleday edition of the work, later revised for the 1963 edition, seems to take its direction based in part on Conrad's *Author's Note*. While Zabel examines the novel in the context of Conrad's previous works, he also pays quite a bit of attention to the Russian question: "In *Under Western Eyes* Conrad wrote a political novel which today, half a century after its publication, still stands as pre-eminent of its kind in English fiction and calls for a rank in European fiction as well" (Zabel xlv). The argument may not be with the reported spirit of Conrad's stated intent, but in that the psychological is indeed concurrently the political. There does not seem to be any true separation within the Russian characters of one from the other, as can be seen in Haldin on an extreme scale and Razumov on a more subdued level. Zabel is also aware of Conrad's concern for impartiality in writing the novel, despite "the Polish question" as the author had taken the pains to outline within his *Author's Note* (lv). Zabel's essay had been preceded by a study of the workings of revolution within Conrad's novels by Robert F. Haugh, who drew parallels between *Lord Jim* and the later novel. The main thrust of Haugh's argument, however, dealt mainly with character development from Jim to Razumov and the plausibility of each character's developmental and story arc.

Just as Zabel addresses Conrad's concerns, so does Julian B. Kaye in a 1957 essay comparing the plot structure and narration techniques of *Under Western Eyes* with Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. Kaye brings attention to Conrad's specter of "the Russian autocracy, of which he had been both subject and victim" in an often recurring emphasis on his upbringing as a base in which Conrad grounds the novel (*Conrad's Under Western Eyes and Mann's Doctor Faustus* 60). The sentiment is echoed by Leo Gurko's 1960 essay in *College English*, which was later included in his volume entitled *Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile*. To Gurko, "the novel is as much Conrad's analysis of the country oppressing his own as of the life of Razumov. The two—character and nation—are so fused at the beginning that each appears dramatized and advanced through the other" (*Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile* 446). Thus the idea of there being little if any separation between the psychological and political seems to be reinforced throughout the earlier criticism. There is among these authors also an understanding, mostly through brief mentions, of the parallels between Conrad's novel and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The comparison of Raskolnikov to Razumov seems to have become commonplace by this time and continues through the following decades as a more or less established fact with nuances and variations. Gurko also seems to echo Zabel in his assertion that "Russia [...] is everything Western Europe is not" (*Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile* 447).

In his 1959 essay *The Rise and Fall of Under Western Eyes*, Frederick Karl argues that Conrad's aesthetic ability either failed him or had not been given the attention it deserved while he composed this novel. He compares what he considers Conrad's

influences, in this case Rousseau and Dostoyevsky, and acknowledges the *homo-duplex* condition Conrad reports to have functioned within, while elevating the worth of the original story that served as its basis, “Razumov,” above that of the finished novel.

An interesting turn in the examination of Conrad’s work in general and *Under Western Eyes* specifically is taken in Lois Michel’s 1961 article *The Absurd Predicament of Conrad’s Political Novels*. Michel puts forth an existential interpretation of Conrad’s works and posits that they are based on the idea of absurdity as the state of the world and the individual’s efforts to stave off despair through physical action in which he might lose himself. The only one of Conrad’s major characters who reportedly succeeds in this effort is Razumov. The reading of the novel then naturally elevates it to the pinnacle of Conrad’s creative ability rather than placing it just past that point as is often the case with other critics’ assessment. Although the novel may indeed be of the greatest importance among Conrad’s works, it is not for that reason. Rather than elevating Razumov’s role within the oeuvre, it is the importance of the narrator, the Teacher of Languages, that must be considered on the level of functionality and circumstance.

During the 1960s and 70s, Conrad’s earlier works, namely *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* began to attract greater popular and critical attention. Some authors have speculated that this was due to America’s unpopular Vietnam War and an increasing sense of a global, rather than national, political theater, in which all could be vaporized in a matter of seconds. Conrad’s sensibility in his *Heart of Darkness*, his awareness of the duality and changeability of the human being under differing circumstances, had appealed to the new global era. Such an approach to the human psyche may have been

based on theories as yet unformulated or unpopular during Conrad's lifetime. But it seemed to resonate greatly with a generation dissatisfied with the norms and expectation, social restrictions and mores of an earlier age. In a near-postmodern and soon to be post-colonial world, Conrad presented the readership and scholars alike with a figure as post-modern and cosmopolitan as they were. The figure of a writer he had cut also offered a chance to point to an earlier age and there find an anchor that transversed the hardships and social trends of the Great Depression and World War Two. The renewed interest in Conrad did not yield only a greater number of readers and scholars interested in Conrad studies, but also led to the establishment of the two major journals in the field:

Conradian in the United Kingdom and *Conradiana* in the United States. These journals opened up the possibility of exploring all aspects of Conrad studies and bolstered the writer's standing within literary studies in general.

Perhaps thanks to the popular and academic attention Conrad's earlier works were receiving, more scholars became interested in his other works as well. *Under Western Eyes* was one of those that benefited from the expansion of the field and the newly available venues for publication. The number of academic articles dealing with that novel seems to have more than doubled from the early sixties into the 1970s. Earlier critics were joined by the likes of Zdislaw Najder, Ian Watt, Frank Kermode, and Edward Said.

Not only did the number of published studies increase, but so did the variety of approaches and avenues of inquiry. Adam Gillon attempted to draw a literary lineage between Conrad and the Polish Romantic writers using thematic and textual analysis. The focus, as with most studies of this kind, was on Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeus* which

was one of the main nationalist- romantic texts of Poland during Conrad's youth and one with which he is known to have been more than familiar . Still, Gillon argues that Conrad did not remember enough of Polish life, having left as a boy who did not write for another twenty years, to draw upon his youth for the writing he performed in his adoptive language. If the theory holds, then the Polish literary motifs could not have influenced him as greatly as Gillon assumes. Yet, as Gillon further argues, Conrad is still best understood by Poles, which may or may not be akin to the understanding, or at the very least popularity, the publication of *Under Western Eyes* in Russia had won for him. It is the Polish aspect of Conrad's life which is bound to shed a bit more light on the workings of the novel in general and its narrator in specific. And it is also a connection, though seen by Gillon, which he did not quite discern in its finer workings.

Rather than examining the story structures and motifs of the novel, Avrom Fleishman analyzed the novel's metafictional aspects, dividing the text into three major components. The 'A' text as the text written by the author, the 'B' text as that written by the narrator, and the 'C' text as the source material, that is the diary from which the narrator then translated and shaped the narrative. Later studies built on this foundation, postulating a Derridian effect of such a breakdown of the texts. The book itself had become the object, yet within it contained other objects which then made up the whole, thus creating a self-referential effect. The universe of *Under Western Eyes* had to be analyzed from within itself and based upon the codes which seemed to bleed to the surface. Each part was responsible not only for the action within the novel, but for the appearance it gave outwardly to those casually looking upon the printed volume.

Another approach to *Under Western Eyes* was somewhat more “orthodox” and dealt with the effects of Conrad’s Polish youth and exile on his desire, or perhaps on his need, to become an English writer, which then must have been reflected by the novel since it addressed the subjects of Russia and the West simultaneously. Peter Stein takes the discussion a step further away from Gustav Morf’s study by finding the teacher of languages an apologetic figure attempting to atone for Conrad’s desertion of Poland.

Contemporaneously with the debate regarding the variations and the final version of the novel’s text, the aspect of Conrad’s worldly pressures seemed unavoidable. Emily Izsak argued that Conrad was not driven by a need to write, but, having been ensnared in the publishing industry’s apparatus and heavily in debt to his agent, could do no more than keep the course. Thus he was prevented from making a transition to a different school of thought, one which later became established in France by Sartre and others. Of course, when one comparison has been made another cannot be far behind, especially since it had become the standard, ‘orthodox’ manner of interpreting the novel. Thus Izsak explores some of the points in the relationship between Conrad’s novel and Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. Izsak’s speculation on the forgone possibility of an outright transition from a Modern approach to the novel and subject to an existential manner of thought and construction had been contradicted, to a large degree, by Michel’s earlier opinion that Conrad indeed had not only made the transition, but had always written within the existential mode of thought. Izsak also cited the differences between the manuscript and published versions of the novel in order to support her hypothesis of

stagnation. The editing down of the manuscript seemed indicative of Conrad's recoiling from a mode of thought that was more controversial during that time.

In the late 1980s, David Leon Higdon contradicted Iszak's premise, arguing that the changes in manuscript and published versions were of a stylistic nature and did not amount to any significant loss of word count, nor in a loss of content. Contrary to the minute detail of Higdon's study, Cedric Watts maintained that the novel was severely altered due to Conrad's breakdown subsequent the falling out with his agent, J.B. Pinker. The breakdown, as is documented by Jessie Conrad, caused Conrad to become paranoid and delusional and to work, at times feverishly, at reducing the novel's scope, thus eliminating a substantial amount of the manuscript (30,000 words). Watts' assertion, though reasonable enough, that Conrad's paranoia may have caused him to eliminate so much from his novel seems to agree with Iszak's opinion that Conrad was headed toward a new philosophical approach to the practice of fiction when market forces, commonly represented in both cases by Pinker, caused him to turn back. Such a shift could indeed have been caused by the confrontation upon Conrad's delivery of the manuscript of *Under Western Eyes*. Yet, it seems that the most crucial shift caused by his subsequent breakdown was in his personal geography, which had to absorb and recalibrate the blow it sustained from Pinker's attack. A shift in philosophy, if it occurred at all, could be discerned in Conrad's working over some of the crucial points of bridging the cultures in a more careful manner. Stylistically, it would seem reasonable to speculate that Conrad's writing would have changed drastically following the publication of the material already completed at the time of his breakdown. And although the aesthetic and linguistic

changes in *Under Western Eyes* are an apparent departure from the manner of expressing thought in his previous works, this is evident primarily in the density of the material and shedding of responsibility directly tied to the narrator. The style of writing in his reminiscences published in *A Personal Record*, or that of “The Secret Shearer”, does not seem to indicate any other major shift in the fundamental aspects of Conrad’s philosophy.

Rather, it is likely that the shift that had indeed taken place, as Izsak might argue, can be discerned by how little had changed on the surface of the reminiscences. The books had been written alongside one another and therefore for stylistic innovations to have been practiced only within the fictional text seems unlikely. Furthermore, *Under Western Eyes*, as Michael Greaney later argued, is a linguistically evasive and violently subversive book in its use of signs and silence. The narrator, the Teacher of Languages, is not wholly able to decipher the text that he interprets nor the text he produces. Greaney posits that Conrad had tried to avoid writing the novel in the first place, simply because his audience would be unable to understand its underlying meanings. Thus, the meanings of things unsaid are as important as the signifiers used in the narration of the text.

A study by Jennifer Fraser published in 2005 elaborates on the subject of meaning in silence. Fraser argues that Conrad had constructed meanings within the realm of grief and grieving through the figure of the abandoned Razumov and that Jaques Derrida had elaborated the basic idea into “the philosophy of deconstruction” (Fraser 264). Fraser focuses on the connection of being and being alone, grieving and thus speaking with ghosts, stating that Razumov “enters at the end of the novel into a phantom world whose silence is deafening,” all for the preservation of the ego. Derrida, she states, would

“express this concisely “Ego = ghost. Therefore ‘I am’ would mean ‘I am haunted’” (*Specters* 133)” (Fraser 264-65). Fraser echoes Keith Carabine’s analysis of the “Author’s Note” to *A Personal Record* as well, making the link between Razumov and Conrad a personal one. Thus Conrad becomes the one who grieves through the text of the novel, even while the doubling between Razumov and Conrad so often examined by critics aids the author in allowing his “shades ... to return to their place where their forms in life linger yet” (*PR* xii). Silence, though used to communicate the incommunicable, to the Western sensibility, aspects of being, is not useful in exorcising or learning to exist with one’s shades: “For Derrida and Conrad, mourning requires articulation: one must hear *and* speak” (Fraser 252). *Under Western Eyes* is Conrad’s effort to “express imaginatively the general truth which underlines its action” (*UWE* 281). This action seems to concern an exorcism of sorts, one during which Conrad may have succeeded in ridding himself of a portion of his own grief. Certainly, combined with the simultaneously written reminiscences of *A Personal Record*, the effort seems gargantuan.

A linguistic-philosophical interpretation of the nature practiced by Fraser might also apply to some of the most often quoted lines from the fictional preface to the novel. Yet, these may also cause the interpretation Fraser had put forth to be undermined, if not to topple, because of its reliance on the ability to use language and its need for communication. The Teacher-narrator’s statement that:

Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality. I have been for many years a teacher of languages. It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes

a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot. (*UWE* 3)

may seem pessimistic to some critics and has been interpreted as nihilistic. Distrust certainly does permeate the passage: a distrust of words as useful tools, of words' ability to convey meanings, but in the greatest part of the human element in the ability to use them properly. In making people into parrots, Conrad seems to address linguistic issues in general, later making use of the theories of socialization, or perhaps making his own theories. It seems likely that Conrad would have been aware of Ivan Pavlov's work with the Conditional Reflex on dogs. And if dogs could be taught to salivate according to a type of stimulus, then why could not parrots be induced to learn a language and to use it in order to express themselves and not simply call out obscenities aboard a stereotypical sea going vessel? If Conrad's command of Russian had been less than stellar – as is mine – and his familiarity with Ukrainian greater, perhaps he had extrapolated on Pavlov's actual name for the reflex, which from its Russian version условный рефлекс can be translated shoddily as *reflex of the word* or *agreed upon* or *conventional reflex*. He did not have to be overly familiar with the experiments and it is likely that he had indeed been aware of Pavlov's work. The scientist had, after all, won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1904.

If language is a reflex, then, Conrad must have seen its construction from a multi-lingual perspective and its usage as not only being shaped by social norms, but also as reinforcing them. So it may be fair to say that he had been a precursor to the likes of Roman Jakobson and Jaques Derrida in his breaking down of the socio-linguistic

structure and applying the notion to parrots. Hence it also becomes fair to say that Emily Izsak's notion of Conrad's recoiling from advancement in a new direction was certainly a rather perceptive conclusion. Conrad did not articulate the theory outright, rather choosing to illustrate it in a fictional work. Izsak's expectation of further development on a theoretical level may have been better directed at a nonfictional target, however. Her conclusion presumes that the new direction had not been taken when it is arguable that it had been taken indeed.

Lois Michel's hypothesis that Conrad's characters actually did labor within an uncaring universe takes on new importance as well. If the human ability to communicate is socially constructed, even to the point of phrasing and the emotional responses thus triggered, it not only becomes necessary to communicate with the shades of one's past; but the definition of shades changes substantially to include virtually everyone and everything. The self becomes the only possible center of import. Yet, if the Ego does equal Ghost, even the self is not entirely reliable. In Edward Said's understanding of Conrad, life was made up of episodes and the impressions those had made upon the person. In effect, Conrad's person was made up of seemingly significant episodes and his impressions of them was all that remained. Thus the Ego is Ghost, with only the ghosts, or impressions, of one's past. These impressions are necessarily translated from a pre-verbal to a verbal state, thus being further shaped by the socio-linguistic conventions of the language into which they are being fitted. And what is left of the ego is nothing more than a ghostly impression bolstered and reconstituted by and in the image of socio-linguistic conventions within a given place and time.

Perhaps the most important notion in ego expression – that writerly attempt by Conrad to express his underlying truths through language – becomes the linguistic medium through which the action of communicating takes place. Conrad, however, was multi-lingual. His understanding of the world and the impressions which he carried within him, his thoughts and emotions, all were taking place in a pre-linguistic space that, unlike for monolingual persons and speakers of a single native language, could convert all in a native or near-native way to at least three languages. Thus, the underlying codes of each language would not become separate entities prior to their utterance. The resulting psychic environment must have carried a greater weight in the near-chaos such a state created. The manner in which each impression functioned for Conrad on a pre-verbal level must have varied greatly. It was only once he did endeavor to express them that language would come into play. Words could fail easily in any attempt to express the thoughts he intended. Such a failure could occur in any instance when Conrad misjudged or did not recognize the social situation in which he found himself. With both his maternal and adoptive socio-linguistic geographies being contained in each possible utterance, the probability of language failing was great. His foreignness could show at any moment and in any socio-linguistic geography, whether this might have been England or Poland.

It is not surprising that Daniel Melnick recognizes that failure and posits that the power behind the things left unsaid is perhaps greater than that of those expressed. And perhaps this is the reason why Conrad had chosen such an imprecise language as English for the medium of his art; it did not define or pin down meaning in the same manner that

a more exact one, such as French or Polish, would have. Therefore it did not restrict his thought quite as severely, allowing for multiple levels of codes to function.

Catherine Rising makes the connection between the autobiographical and fictional selves as well, arguing that *Under Western Eyes* is Conrad's expression of the un/sub/conscious self's existential dilemmas. Greaney's insistence on the narrator's inability to decipher the text he is producing may be linked to a choice made by Conrad to see Razumov's story from a linguistically dictated point of view, one which does not possess like functions with the text he is translating. Conrad's pre-verbal, linguistically uncommitted self does, however, understand what his narrator and writer produce, which makes the novel more difficult to decipher from a mono-lingual interpretive viewpoint.

The predicament of grieving and writing at once, of making sense of ghostly impressions, and of commitment to this or the other heritage is addressed more closely, and very perceptively, by Amar Acheraïou in his article *The Shadow of Poland*. Though Acheraïou places emphasis on the shifting physical borders and various colonizing powers of Poland, he also addresses Conrad's linguistic predicament in the aforementioned work as well as in 2005 *Conradiana* article:

A key poststructuralist concept, deterritorialization is a metaphor of fragmentation, disorder, and discontinuity. Related to the larger post-modernist project of decentering, it refers to the process whereby Conrad's characters seek to escape from coercive social, ideological, and linguistic codes understood as territory. (*Going Beyond Limits* 173)

And although his need to speak the grief may be great, Conrad also attempts to avoid some of the traps laid down by those very same socio-linguistic codes in his writing.

These, as previously mentioned, present themselves at the very moment that pre-verbal thoughts must be committed to a distinct form of language-based communication.

Therefore the Teacher / narrator figure chooses a manner of seeing through a Western perspective, while the language he is translating is allowed to be dense, perhaps indecipherable to the very same audience for which the translation is tailored.

Acheraiou goes on to examine Razumov's predicament, yet his analysis seems to apply more closely to Conrad's case: "[A]s well as standing for absolute geographies, the real and mythic worlds enact radical modes of thought and being which operate on three different levels: the level of language, identity, and history" he writes (*Going Beyond Limits* 176). In postulating the divided nature of the character, Acheraiou seems to outline the writer's nature as well. It is in the divided space that Conrad must find his pre-linguistic center, or ego, and somehow cause it to unify well enough so that he, as an actor within his own narrative, written or not, can proceed to function. Again, Acheraiou states that "[f]or [Conrad], salvation is therefore not located in the "here" and "there" but in the "in-between." It is to be found in that *zero geography* which is a space of creation, meaning, and edification of a multi-dynamic identity" (*Going Beyond Limits* 183). Conrad's identity must be perceived as one which exists as the site of a geography he was forced to create in order to survive. It is the amalgamation of the pre-linguistic self with a heteroglossic social entity which recreates itself in every instance of commitment to a specific geography.

Acheraiou's analysis traces the questions of Conrad's psychic development as a writer through the significant characters, like Marlow and Jim, of his novels. It also puts

forth a premise from which further study can be conducted upon the “most meditated” of Conrad’s novels. An interpretation of the purpose of *Under Western Eyes* must take into account the notion of “zero geography” if it is to read the evasive codes presented within the book and if it is to understand Conrad’s purpose, beyond the admitted usefulness to his audience, of the Teacher of Languages. In a 2007 article, Yael Levin reads the narrator as “shielded by the guise of an obtuse bystander.” The Teacher’s comments are “tactless” and “repeatedly demonstrate his ignorance in relation to everything Russian. ... Evidently, the narrator is old and foreign to the Russian nature, and cannot possibly understand” (*The Moral Ambiguity of Conrad’s Poetics* 220). His story then becomes his “spy report” to the West. Further, “the Conradian storyteller is protected by the immunity that comes with the aesthetic of the vicarious. Avoiding the “edge of the precipice,” the Conradian storyteller will neither experience true dizziness, nor suffer the wrath of retribution (*UWE* 349)” (Levin 226). Accordingly, the narrator functions as a spy whose audience is the readership. He is, in effect, bridging the gap between the exotic (oriental) and the everyday, much as Conrad himself must maintain an equilibrium in a “zero geography” and “zero expression” while also functioning within the defined geography and language of his exile. He must span the distinct and incongruous parts of his existence in order to maintain himself, thus becoming something of a Sibyl in person and on the page. Yet he must span the gap of the pre-linguistic zero center, if only to prove that such communication is possible, if not outright beneficial to the Western world.

Conrad’s predicament is rather complex and, as can be seen through the interpretations and assessments put forth by scholars since the publication of *Under*

Western Eyes, the inroads into understanding how it plays out within the pages of the novel are many. Each critic had uncovered another possible venue of exploration and each, as must be expected with a work of such density, had come up short of a definitive answer to the intent and purpose of Conrad's composition of the novel. Some facts seem incontrovertible. Conrad wrote under less than ideal conditions. His indebtedness to his agent and his friends contributed to the difficulties with composition. There are thematic and character likenesses between his novel and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Conrad has been shown to base some of his characters and their actions on the historical figures of his time. The concern for bridging the gap in understanding between the Western and Eastern European ways of thought and expression is stated outright and seems to be genuine enough. Conrad used a proxy as an ideal narrator, though that narrator, the Teacher of Languages, presents yet another layer of obstruction through his interpretation. The Teacher shares some basic traits with his predecessor, Marlow. And lastly, though not finally, the novel has a companion book of sorts in *A Personal Record*, not only because the two were written contemporaneously, but also because both volumes deal with issues close to Conrad's vest, and, perhaps, in the manner that both are presented in widely divergent tones, yet skillfully targeted and dense in their own right.

Chapter 3: Under Western Eyes

I: Story and the Reader

While Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* is a novel which does address "things Russian" with a view to making these more comprehensible to the Western reader, it also remains a riddle in myriad ways. Though much valuable insight has been revealed throughout the decades of critical analysis of this book, certain of its, perhaps, most important components seem to have been neglected. Specifically, this study attempts to establish what can be empirically discerned (through the text itself) about the story used as its basis. Secondly, the manner in which the story is related to the reader must be examined in order to fully grasp Conrad's spirit behind its composition.

The notion of a critical examination is a subjective enterprise. Its results, as fruitful as these may be, are influenced by one's ability to place oneself within the pages of the work itself, to empathize with the characters, to become a part of the work, much as the writer has. The critical reader's ability to do all those things is crucial to the transmission of the writer's intended meaning to an audience. This meaning, however, will always be colored by the reader's ability to imagine, which in itself depends on that reader's store of experiences and perceptions. Therefore, the enterprise of critical reading

and interpretation is less than perfect. The author's exact intent cannot be divined from the pages of a book. Nor can the author be trusted to reveal the exact impetus and intent behind those pages, since not all factors that influence a given character's reaction to another, nor the choice of one street over a parallel one as the setting of the action may be known to the writer.

Writing a novel, in other words, is not an exact science. The settings and actions the critic may interpret as intentional and specific may not always be more than convenience and circumstance of the writer's choice of one thing over another. Nor are all of the components that make up a novel entirely intentional or known to its author. That being the case, how can a critical reader claim to possess anything approaching a complete knowledge of a novel? Percy Lubbock had summarized the challenges of criticism in the following manner:

Nothing, no power, will keep a book steady and motionless before us, so that we may have time to examine its shape and design. As quickly as we read, it melts and shifts in the memory; ... A little later, after a few days or months, how much is really left of it? A cluster of impressions, some clear points emerging from a mist of uncertainty, this is all we can possess, generally speaking, in the name of a book. The experience of reading it has left something behind, and these relics we call by the book's name; but how can they be considered to give us the material for judging and appraising the book? (*The Craft of Fiction* 2)

Just like the critic, so the writer must then use the impressions a book leaves behind. In Conrad's case, the idea of impressions making up a book is most poignant. In his famous preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* he writes: "Fiction – if it at all aspires to be art – appeals to temperament. ... Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression

conveyed through the senses”(NN xiii). The preface is often considered a manifesto of the guiding principles Conrad used in writing fiction. Not surprising, then, is Lubbock’s assertion that “[t]he real heart and substance of the book ... stands out the more clearly for the obscurity into which the less essential parts of it subside”(*The Craft of Fiction*). This substance, for the critical reader, is made up of the most memorable and most relevant aspects of the narrative, perhaps those having a great share in furthering its plot. Yet, if impressions are the key to a reader’s understanding of a novel and the only traces the work leaves imprinted upon the reader’s mind, then these must be a subjective distillation of that work. Such impressions become what the critical reader must work with in analyzing a novel. But they are a starting point and cannot be the only aspects with which a critic/writer deals. Yet, impressions lead, as Lubbock had intimated, to “the real heart and substance of the book” and without them a critical reader would be left with nothing to attach one’s psychological investment (*The Craft of Fiction* 4). Further, without such an investment the book would remain lifeless before the critical reader. Even its plot could hold no interest. Yet, plot seems important in order to move a story along. It piques a reader’s curiosity, generally speaking, and lends a work of fiction a perceived advantage over other, plotless forms. By plot is meant a story that runs the length of the book and acts as a skeleton to it. All this has, of course, been debated and plotless variants of fiction have been tried, yet all, in spite of the discussion and attempts at the practice of “plotless” novels, must contain a trace of a story. The reader is lost without it. The only impressions that may remain of a plotless story are of being set adrift in an uncontrolled sea of words without a guide.

Perhaps that is why Conrad tended to use a narrative frame that includes a guide. He may have been making certain that the meaning of his story was not misconstrued and the impressions he wanted his readers to retain were calibrated to have the greatest possible impact and did not fall away too quickly. Yet, in *Under Western Eyes* the storyteller, that indispensable Conradian guide, is not one with whom the reader might have been acquainted from the pages of previous novels. It must have seemed to Conrad that a narrator different from Marlow in fundamental ways would be best at conveying the impressions Conrad had wanted to impress upon his readers.

In the following pages I will examine the novel's most general as well as integral components. Namely, I will put forward the notion that Conrad intentionally or unintentionally used this story as a vehicle in order to put forth not only a political or social agenda, but also a much more personal one. In terms of a political agenda, Conrad seems to abdicate any preconceived attitudes in order to bring to the reader "the psychology of Russia itself" rather than any judgment in particular (*UWE* 281). That cannot be accomplished, however, without depicting the socio-political environment within which such psychology functions. His description of that environment is not without its attitudes and judgments, even if they are meant to sound neutral to a Western sensibility. Through his depictions of political and social situations, Conrad also imparts the types of impressions that allow him to code a personal aspect within the story, mainly thanks to its setting and narrator.

II: The Story Proper

In order better to understand what might actually be happening within the pages of this novel, it is necessary to discern Conrad's primary focus, that is, his focus on the story he actually did write. In his "Author's Note" he expressed that "I need not say that in writing this novel I had no other object in view than to express imaginatively the general truth which underlies its action" (*UWE* 281). In accordance with this statement, one must understand the action before being able to grasp its truth.

A possible summary of the 'action' within *Under Western Eyes* may be read in the following manner:

A university student at St. Petersburg, by the name of Kyrilo Sidorovich Razumov, who is an illegitimate child of a high government functionary, is, in the course of his uneventful, lonely life, propelled into a world of intrigue due to a visit from a fellow classmate, Victor Haldin, who has just assassinated a government minister and, in the process, killed many innocent bystanders. Haldin needs help escaping from Russia, which Razumov initially agrees to provide in order to keep his new association hidden. When it becomes apparent that he cannot carry out the plan that would remove Haldin from his room and the city, and that he isn't likely to keep the fact of Haldin's visit from the authorities, he gives the fellow up to the police. Haldin is hanged. Razumov is drawn into governmental intrigue and, in time, agrees to become a spy. He goes to Geneva and

there meets a circle of revolutionists, as well as Haldin's sister and mother. To all of these people, he confesses, in turn, his true role in the affair of Victor Haldin and his position as a Russian government spy. For this reason he is rendered deaf by the revolutionist assassin, who bursts Razumov's ear drums following the confession, and, as a result of his deafness, Razumov is run over by a tram car. He recovers sufficiently to move back to Russia under the care of a disgruntled member of the Russian exile community in Geneva. There he presumably lives out the rest of his days, acting as a sort of oracle for the revolutionist community.

Of course, such a summary leaves out much. There is no mention of a narrator, nor of Razumov's journal, nor of his supposed infatuation with Miss Haldin. There is no discourse about the soul of things Russian, nor any criticism of democratic systems. There is no *Ili Russeou*, nor the water flowing around it. In short, there are few impressions included in such a plot summary. Though one could argue that even the little that remains within the plot as stated is nothing but a collection of impressions, let us assume, for the matter of convenience, that it indeed is merely the skeleton of a single character's track through the story underpinning this novel. But also, let us put a little meat on the bare bones and add a few more impressions.

Part First is begun by the narrator disclaiming any "possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader" essentially the very same fiction which the reader is embarking upon reading (*UWE* 4). To disclaim these gifts means to lend the narrative that is to follow a veneer of non-fiction. For the purposes of the story's believability, it may indeed have been necessary,

assuming that it is aimed at a Western European audience. The enhancement of this sense of reality, though it may not be a reality directly available to the narrator, is accomplished through its being “based on a document” (*UWE* 4). This document is the diary the leading character has kept after the fact of most of the events that take place within the novel, therefore an artifact already milled and refined by the time the narrator gains access to it. Thus, even before the action ever begins for the reader, it has long been concluded for its main character and narrator alike. In this sense, the novel, as well as its basis, have become artifacts further intriguing, one might assume, the reader to be initiated into its mystery, not only of action but also of origin.

From the introductory pages, the reader is transported into the action proper. Here the story begins to reveal Mr. Razumov’s character as it fits within the milieu of his surroundings and seems to draw a fine line between an narratorial omniscience – correctly based and justified through the narrator’s access to the diary, hence to Razumov’s supposedly innermost emotions and thoughts – and character interiority. Razumov is jolted from his cocoon-like existence of ambition to mediocrity – he’s trying for a silver medal, not gold, in an essay competition – by the intrusion into his private rooms by a fellow student, Haldin, a revolutionist who has just assassinated a government minister, Mr. de P — : “He had to be stopped. He was a dangerous man – a convinced man,” says Haldin in explanation of his act to Razumov (*UWE* 12). Haldin’s own fanaticism of conviction, however, is invisible to himself and, through the preceding statement, no matter the explanations and qualifications that follow it, he indicts himself for the same fanaticism that accompanies de P —’s crimes. Yet his victims, with the

single notable exception, are outright innocent. By confining in Razumov, Haldin sows the seeds of his demise in Razumov's mind of reason, who later must decide how and whether he can continue to exist in the life he has built out of virtually nothing. As an orphan, Razumov is predisposed to the bottom line of self defense against all intrusions from without. Having no success in following the initial plan for Haldin's safe escape from the Russian autocratic machine, and facing up to his own predicament, regardless of the outcome for Haldin, Razumov seeks assistance in ways he thinks can help him save his own life. This results in Razumov's 'betrayal' of Haldin, who then perishes at the hands of the Russian police.

Despite Razumov's maneuvering and somewhat valiant effort to maintain his compromised persona in the clear, he is forced to abandon his dreams of a career in public service at a university. Councillor Mikulin's, the government's chief investigator, "Where to?" closes the first part, allowing – or forcing perhaps – Razumov's transformation from university student to a spy (*UWE* 74).

Part the Second transports the action to Geneva and a new, though foreshadowed and related, set of characters. It is a prolonged introduction or rather a preparation for Razumov's arrival there. This arrival does eventually materialize, but only once the groundwork is laid. Haldin's mother and sister, Natalia, are sketched and fleshed out gradually, though the mother remains a two-dimensional cutout of what a Russian mother's position within a certain class might be. Natalia, on the contrary, is nearly as spirited as her brother had been. She gradually becomes obsessed with her brother's "intimate friend," Razumov, and pines, in her Russian way, finally to meet him (*UWE*

100). This she does by coincidence, while visiting the lair of the exiled Russian revolutionaries. The meeting between Natalia and Razumov is awkward and seems rather unsatisfactory, not only from a reader's perspective, but also from the perspective of both fictional parties. Albeit, Natalia is infatuated, thanks to her late brother's high praise of Razumov in a letter, indicating him as one of "[u]nstained, lofty, and solitary existences" (*UWE* 100). This, alone, might not have given Natalia over to obsession, but coupled with devotion and longing for any remnant of her brother's existence, she places a set of expectations – much as her dead brother had – based on a faulty interpretation of a faulty interpretation upon Razumov's persona. This leads to the very infatuation, which seems very unlikely in the given case, yet carries much, perhaps too much, weight throughout the rest of this novel.

It is only after another meeting of the would-be lovers, during which the narrator is present and following which he becomes involved in the tale as more than an observer, that the reader is delivered into Part Third. The cadre of Russian revolutionists expands its membership at this point to include Razumov's supposed arch-nemesis, Sophia Antonovna. Yet, it is she who makes it possible for Razumov to gain more trust within that community, in spite of her probing questions and interpretations of his actions and in spite of the reports she receives from her watchers in Russia. Through the words of the celebrated revolutionist character of Peter Ivanovich, the great feminist, again the echoes of Conrad's perpetual concern with belonging to a specific world or level of society are heard, in much the same wording as they had been expressed in his *Lord Jim*. The

community, in other words, has claimed Razumov as its own. ““But you, at any rate, are one of *us*.”” To which statement “Razumov smiled bitterly” (*UWE* 153).

His smile is bitter, for he knows his independent nature. Being counted among the revolutionists may be his job, but the smile is also bitter because of his familial background. The first time he becomes a part of something that is not an institution, the whole enterprise is a sham. He is contemptuous and a traitor, yet, never having been a revolutionist, he cannot have betrayed an idea or persons adherent to it. His only allegiance is to Russia, though this is doubtful as well. To Razumov, “[t]his has been a comedy of errors. It was as if the devil himself were playing a game with all of them in turn” (*UWE* 209). He is only the devil’s agent, whose purpose is unknown to himself. To put it another way, Razumov is nobody’s agent, a wild card, a regular man with regular aspirations in life. The only aspect of him that may be considered a singular trait is his awareness of that regularity and his nearly obsessive aspiration toward it. He has been looking out for himself and now has managed to keep alive a while longer than he had imagined possible at the moment when his space had been invaded by a revolutionist named Haldin. By the close of this chapter, on Rousseau’s island, he begins to write. “There can be no doubt that I am now safe,” he thinks (*UWE* 214).

But safety, as such, is relative. Razumov is safe from the possible wrath of the revolutionists who have accepted him as one of them. He is safe from the autocratic apparatus of Russia, perhaps because he has written the report that he will send to the Russian embassy in Vienna, thereby fulfilling his end of the bargain with Councillor Mikulin. Most of all, he is safe because of Rousseau’s island. That is to say, he is safe

because he is in the West of Europe, in a city that is the ‘cradle of democracy,’ its foremost exemplar. And he is also safe because he has arrived to play the spy game of his own volition, as is revealed at the outset of Part Fourth. This last is perhaps the most important aspect of Razumov’s character and directs his actions in the last chapter. His insistence on being independent carries with it the obligation to a personal core of values. These values then act as guiding principles and lead him to reveal himself to the revolutionist community of *la petite russie* as a spy, right after the revelation of his actual role in the whole Haldin affair to the ladies Haldin. His eardrums are then burst and he is run over by a tramcar, landing him in the hospital for some lengthy stretch of time. The novel ends with him living in “a little two-roomed wooden house, in the suburb of some very small town” in the south of Russia (*UWE* 278). Because of his public confession, however, Razumov becomes something of a symbol for the revolutionist community. His existence gains a moral high ground, despite the loss of what he had imagined for himself in life and his impulse for revenge. As an independent thinker, he has proven himself to both the autocratic government and revolutionist camp, thus becoming truly independent of either. It is his independence and neutrality that likens Razumov to Geneva, a city that does not react – at least in this narrative – to the world outside, being insensate to all others and insular. The latter is dictated and reinforced by its physical location. It would seem, however, that Razumov’s return to Russia and his relative freedom within that autocratic regime leaves the realm of the plausible. The outcome seems to clash with the initial impetus for self-preservation. He has, in effect, reentered the mouth of the lion of his own free will and the lion has not bothered to close it. The arrangement may be

serviceable for the purposes of the story, yet seems to strain the bounds of reality in the spirit of which the book is composed. Deaf and disabled, Razumov ceases to be the focus of the last lines of the novel and is replaced by Peter Ivanovich, who “is an inspired man” in the eyes of Sophia Antonovna (*UWE* 280).

To put it another way, Razumov’s story is concluded before the novel ends. The main focus switches from the one who seemed to be the main character and zeroes in on the character who seemed to be driving force around which the revolutionists of Geneva had coalesced. This can be construed as a commentary on the situation of Russia and Russians abroad in relation to the political system of that country. The individual, no matter his or her significance of the moment may be drawn into a situation with wider implications, yet is quickly replaced once he or she manages to exit that scenario. Peter Ivanovich would fare just the same were he to abdicate his role in the revolutionary community.

For Razumov, the story is concluded, yet its trajectory within the political sphere is maintained beyond his part in it. Even the narrator is left behind to tell Razumov’s story and to tie up loose ends by speaking with Sophia Antonovna, thus maintaining his involvement within the larger events and through that his, albeit slight to the revolutionists, usefulness. Razumov’s journey as a student whose aspiration in life was to win a silver medal, that is, to distinguish himself academically, but not too much, to fit in with the social machinery around him, with distinction and respect, yet not wanting to climb too high, was a tactic of self-preservation within an autocratic system. He was disturbed from his trajectory by a revolutionist fellow student, whose actions put all those

around him at risk and who picked Razumov as the one to whom he came precisely because of the existence that Razumov had been leading. This set off a chain of events that disturbed this existence and plunged Razumov into a world of intrigue played for the sake of self-preservation. Yet, he was not an immoral man and could not abide within this world of betrayal. He revealed himself for what he was – a moral human being, independent of social trends and reliant on reason rather than emotion – and as punishment for his betrayal of the community received debilitating punishment, at the hands of those who needed to remain convinced of a cause. Thus maimed, he then returned to Russia and took his place as precisely the type of persona he had initially wanted to become: one who is respected by all sides and to whom others come for advice.

Razumov, then, is not an inspired man, unlike Peter Ivanovich. Instead, he is a safe man, someone to whom everyone can speak and who poses no threat to any party. He achieves his initial dream, yet the price of getting there is not winning a silver medal, rather it is the forfeiture of his hearing, his mobility, and his emotion. In effect, Razumov becomes the embodiment of his name: a man of principled reason devoid of emotional ties or contexts.

To have fastened the novel's import entirely on the impressions one receives from reading Razumov as its main character may not, however, be the correct way to read it. One misses much in attempting to follow the story, as can be seen in Conrad's emphasis on the importance of Peter Ivanovich. Though the events are seemingly chronological and laid out one after another – an impression one receives because of the manner of its

telling, rather than a definite and proper remembrance of the manner in which the novel's chronology is laid out for the reader¹⁰ – allowing for the proper timing and release of information, chronology here is not linear. The information a reader needs to follow the story well enough to understand it is released with great precision. Is “well enough” a way in which a reader should read a novel such as this? Again, is it not mere approximation of the story itself that forms a reader's impressions of what actually happens within its pages? Razumov's is not the only story worth following here. There are “supporting” characters, of course. But, also, there is a fierce competition for the limelight in the manner that the story is told.

Percy Lubbock writes of “the page that has been well read” as having “the best chance of survival” (*The Craft of Fiction* 8). To read a page well, it must be well written. Someone must perform the writing, or telling. In the case of *Under Western Eyes* it is the Teacher of Languages who relates the narrative. His figure looms just as large, if not larger, here as those of Razumov and Haldin's ghost. His “character” is the focus of the following impressions and their examination.

III: The Teacher of Languages

That a narrator within a novel is actually a character as well has long been an accepted concept. When such a character, however, disclaims “those high gifts of

¹⁰ In fact, the chronology shifts backwards by six months between Part First and Part Second. The impression of its being seamless and fluid is due solely to the manner of its narration and the voice which permeates the narrative, thus lending a consistency to its tone.

imagination and expression” needed to relate the impressions he has gained from being an observer and interpreter of such a tale, the boundaries between fiction and reality, as well as between what is a generally accepted notion and something new, begin to blur (*UWE* 3). Perhaps, this is Conrad’s very intention in creating the Teacher of Languages. Through the use of what Penn R. Szittyá calls public and private *personas* in his writing, Conrad erects an obstacle course, a maze for a reader to navigate if that reader wishes to uncover what is happening beneath the veneer of the story being told. Were the focus of this examination to take into account Conrad’s Charlie Marlow and the various other methods of communicating the tales Conrad wrote, it would face the insurmountable task of communicating with shades. That is, even if Conrad’s answers could be trusted, one would be forced somehow to gain answers from each period of his creative career. Each new work is begun with a new stage of thought. One might argue yet that all the works previous to *Under Western Eyes* did, however, lead Conrad to this psychologically necessary novel of covert self revelation. Though commercially not as successful as he must have wished, the work does shed light on the character of the writer. It is with the view to Conrad’s success and well being on a personal and not commercial level, a view that takes into account the writer’s desire for self revelation and public acceptance, that the following examination proceeds.

In the ‘Author’s Note’, added to the 1920 edition, Conrad addresses the difficulties of this work. “My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality. ... I had never been called before to a greater effort of detachment – detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal

memories”(UWE 281). Given the fact that he did manage to detach himself from all that lurks in the psyche on a conscious level, Conrad must have been attempting to communicate in a rather measured tone. His Teacher of Languages must have been meant to facilitate the task of narrating in exactly the type of manner Conrad outlines in the preface of “Part First.” What happens to relating impressions? Or, does the task of becoming impartial necessarily cancel out the mission? If Lubbock was right about how one reads and what is left once a book has been read, the basic elements of any story are the impressions left in its wake. As has been discussed earlier, these impressions are anything but objective. One cannot understand a book from an objective standpoint entirely. Only the elements that resonate within one as they are read, only those that make an impression, for whatever reason, can truly be retained. For the rest, one must reread and make notes in order to grasp those concepts and details of plot and story. One is faced with the daunting task of understanding a work from a holistic viewpoint. It is therefore unlikely that a writer, no matter the retrospective explanation and reasoning, could have remained entirely impartial in writing a work. Yet, from the first pages of *Under Western Eyes* the attempt at exactly such an undertaking seems obvious. This, of course, is the deceptive nature of impressions. They come to the fore, throw light at a dark corner, inform a reader of themselves, and vanish as other impressions rush in to replace them. Lubbock had described this phenomenon rightly and it is perhaps most poignant in this novel.

The impression communicated by the Teacher of Languages during the initial pages of Part First is one of near scientific impartiality and of a professional undertaking

in his translation and relation of the story to its readers. His statement that “the readers of these pages will be able to detect in the story the marks of documentary evidence. And that is perfectly correct. It is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language, which is sufficient for what is attempted here,” gives off an air of professional treatment (*UWE* 3). Upon a more careful examination, however, the narrator puts the burden of interpretation on the reader, rather than making a direct and unequivocal statement. He allows the reader to conjecture a meaning while also undermining that meaning. By the time he begins to speak of his abilities, the narrator essentially undermines any professional or scientific credibility he may have gained by invoking his *readers’ ability* to recognize “documentary evidence,” even if only cursorily. “Sufficient” may sound like a modest term used by an expert, yet it connotes a level of ability that may or may not be up to the task he sets out to perform. In the following paragraph, he then further undermines his expertise by stating: “Yet I confess that I have no comprehension of the Russian character” (*UWE* 3). Although he continues to explain his level of understanding of his subject and thus builds up his readers’ confidence in the narrative again, the scientific veneer is shaken further. These statements are, however, only a preamble to the story proper – as we have seen previously. The remainder of Part First focuses on Razumov and his initial conundrum with Haldin, which sets up the rest of the narrative. Perhaps this is the reason why most critical readers seem to read this novel as mostly about Razumov, Haldin, and Natalia Haldin as its most central figures and relegate the English Teacher to a secondary place in the narrative’s order of importance.

So long as the narrative is focused on Razumov and his travails within the Russian autocracy, the teacher can remain a simple narrator, albeit prone to making commentaries and observations, which, altogether, do fit the narratorial mode. Yet, as Keith Carabine points out:

[...] in Part Second, the old teacher now becomes an actor in, and observer and recorder of, events in the *story* time of his own tale, which begins “about six months before” Part First ends (*UWE* 75). Hence, awkwardly, in the story time reflections in his own first-person tale, he is obliged to write, as if unaware of the St. Petersburg events depicted in the *narrative* or writing time of his translation of Razumov’s journal in Part First. (*The Life and the Art* 30)

Though it seems true that the teacher pretends to be ignorant of Razumov’s journal and the events he describes in Part First that are based upon that journal, he does not “write as if unaware” of those events. Rather, he again employs a tactic which had previously allowed him to be understood in a broad enough sense and left room for the temporary suspension of knowledge already presented to the reader: “Aware of my limitations and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, I would not try (were I able) to invent anything. I push my scruples so far that I would not even invent a transition” (*UWE* 75). Of course, this statement becomes the transition and is followed by recounting the exact point at which the Razumov-centered narrative stops. It would not be possible to transition to a narrative about himself and the ladies Haldin were it not for the information the narrator has already divulged regarding the Haldin family and Victor Haldin’s function within that framework. In other words, it would not be possible to begin a section dealing with the ladies Haldin if the readers did not already know of them. True enough, a new narrative

could begin in much the same way as Part Second and claim its readers' attention. Yet this isn't the case here and one does rely on the preceding section for insight.

As an actor within the Geneva narrative, the Teacher seems somewhat more elusive than he had in Part First. The impressions he conveys range in purpose and usefulness. Mainly, at the outset, they constitute a depiction of Natalia Haldin, with whom the teacher is taken and wishes that his person could be the one to "rouse" Natalia. Yet "clearly" his "person could not be the person" who might be so lucky. Still, he becomes "very much attached to that young girl" (*UWE* 76-77). In forming this attachment he gains a permanent place in the unfolding of the narrative as one of its actors, rather than a simple observer and interpreter, though both of the latter functions are preserved.

Not only does the role of the teacher expand, but it also retains its rudimentary functions from the previous part of the narrative. He isn't "obliged to write, as if unaware of the St. Petersburg events" at all (*The Life and the Art* 30). In fact, in "Part Second, V," he states that "I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge," thus drawing the readers' attention to the fact that Part Second and Part Third, the sections between Mikulin's "Where to?" and the return to Razumov's story as the main subject, are necessary for the unfolding of this narrative, yet are also *backstory*. The *flashback* that occurs in these parts makes the narrative flow in a logical manner and prepares readers for Razumov's reappearance, as well as for the conclusion of the "main" storyline. It also allows us to understand better how such a narrative – one of things Russian – can function within a new, democratic physical and cultural geography. There are incompatibilities between the

Russian character and culture and that of Geneva. It would seem that all Russian characters are actual agents of action within this space – save for Mrs. Haldin, whose immobility and despair make her a cardboard cutout with a truly singular function – while there are no Swiss actors at all. The city functions only as a backdrop to the Russian story. Otherwise, it is deaf and dumb. Its only, more or less, permanent inhabitant tells of the Russians' tale and guides his western readers through the complicated story to the best of his ability.

Perhaps it is because the teacher is so focused on the story at hand that he does not mention the goings on of the city, but for the instances during which they impact the Russian exiles or himself in relation to them. His own affairs that do not fit neatly into the scope of the narrative remain unexplored, as do those parts of the city. Thus, the city gains a train station as the teacher needs to have an excuse and to meet a friend there during his conversation with Razumov in Part Second, V. Or, it is because the narrator as well as the characters of the story are only visitors to Geneva and do not within its scope or any foreseeable future participate in its established life. This particular consideration brings us to the question of the teacher's identity.

Perhaps the most telling effect of Conrad's approach to presenting the identity of the English teacher is Keith Carabine's compound usage. In it, the narrator becomes "the old English teacher of languages." And though we are urged to "to look behind the veil of [Conrad's] chosen teller" Carabine's chosen handle seems an overstatement, perhaps overly descriptive of the narrator's identity (*The Life and the Art* 98). The narrator certainly is a teacher of English literature and a teacher of languages. He styles himself

old and we can choose to believe that he is telling us the truth. The question of veiling does not require us to second-guess his age – though this could come into question as well – but rather to guess the teacher’s nationality and cultural background. It is convenient that many critical readers have accepted and adopted the narrator’s label as “a teacher of languages,” which he gives himself, and have expanded upon it, thus reinforcing the notion of his belonging to a clearly defined national sentiment and camp (*UWE* 3). What is even more important here is that the narrator deliberately chooses to avoid revealing his origin. If we are to understand correctly Keith Carabine’s notion of this narrator as “the old English teacher of languages,” the sense of identity that is thus further inscribed onto this character becomes normalized. Let us compare the label imparted to the narrator with Conrad’s own, initial understanding of himself, as it is often quoted by critics: “Pole, catholic, and Nobleman.” This simple formula, as applied to the narrator, could produce “Teacher, westerner, and Englishman.” What do we gain by applying such a label to either man? A continuous maelstrom of confusing identities which are difficult to delineate and so tend to baffle any and all critics.

All revelations and indicators within the novel might add up to such an impression of the narrator’s character, yet let’s examine the basis of this impression. In the same manner that the teacher avows “no comprehension of the Russian character” he also seems to understand its underpinnings rather well (*UWE* 3). This may be due to his having been “born from parents settled in St. Petersburg” and having “acquired the language as a child.” He claims not to remember the town, but having “renewed [his] acquaintance with the language” some time thereafter he is well enough equipped to

translate a diary and speak Russian fluently (*UWE* 138). So, at once he is unable to understand the people with whom his narrative is populated and whose language bears all the marks of their culture, while being a guide to Western readers of this narrative. His understanding of the story he is telling must be flawed somehow, for it seems unlikely that such a person could function as a cultural bridge between the ‘Oriental’ European and western European modes of understanding.

In answer to Razumov’s invocation, “But you are an Englishman – a teacher of English literature ... People told me you have lived here for years.” all the narrator can return is an evasive: “Quite true. More than twenty years” (*UWE* 138). Thus he avoids having to answer any more of the spy’s questions, maintaining a veiled identity for himself from even the most secretive and veiled of characters within the narrative. The question does, however, remain. It may have been shunted aside and out of the readers’ minds for the moment, perhaps because of the skillful manner with which it was avoided, but the answer – though it never materializes – is not a simple one. Perhaps the narrator is indeed an Englishman by nationality. But having been born and raised near St. Petersburg, having retained enough of the Russian language to be able to perfect it to a sufficient degree in adulthood, and “having left [Russia] for good as a boy of nine” without mentioning where he had gone thereafter and prior to arriving in Geneva, he seems to be rather rootless and somewhat Russified (*UWE* 138). The last is due to having been raised in Russia for a great enough part of his childhood. Yet, being raised in Russia could only have a partial effect in Russifying the narrator. Rather, his adaptation to the Russian community, though he is deemed a Westerner by them, is self-willed. This seems

to indicate that his affinity for the Russian character and its shortfalls is rather potent. Furthermore, it cannot be determined from his evasive answers to Razumov what nationality his parents may have been. One assumes them to have been English or, at the very least, Western European. Their nationality remains a riddle, as does the language spoken in their household. Assuming that the language was English, we must also grant that his upbringing had made the teacher sufficiently English so that he is better able to understand the English character than its Russian counterpart. Yet, none of these speculations can be confirmed through textual evidence, since the Teacher sanitizes the text in order to remain unidentifiable beyond the very basics of his existence.

The similarity between a sufficiency in English and Russian, judging from the self confessed latter and through conjecture of the former, leads to an inconclusive state of being. That is, the teacher may not be a Russian, but his Englishness – having been raised in Russia and thus socialized within that society during the most crucial years of a child's development – must be questioned. He furthermore has lived in Geneva for “[m]ore than twenty years,” a *fact* to which he attests in his exchange with Razumov (*UWE* 138). It is the only actual fact to which readers and characters within the novel can refer. So it is perhaps through his consistent invocations of Western sentiment and modes of understanding, or because of the manner in which the narrator seems to explain the Russian character, as if to make it more accessible to a Western readership, or his fruitless infatuation with Natalia, during which he consistently calls himself old, that readers are left with the impression of him as “the old English teacher of languages” (*The Life and the Art* 98). Yet, this convenient, all encompassing handle is composed mainly

of impressions and evasions. It does not reveal the narrator's actual national and cultural identity, nor his personal geography which may serve to better situate him, nor does it address his age. Rather, this handle inscribes upon the teacher's character its main traits – teacher of languages and teacher of English poetry – while also inscribing those traits that are mere impressions – old and Englishman. What, then, are the narrator's implicit allegiances and his cultural and social standing? In other words, where does this man fit in the world of Geneva? For a more direct answer, one must again turn to Conrad's later note to this novel.

Having penned his 'Author's Note' to the 1920 edition of *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad refuses "to justify [the Teacher's] existence." Yet, he also uses the handle of "the old teacher of languages" to describe his narrator (*UWE* 282). Thus Conrad does not mention a nationality and only states the narrator's functions as they were revealed in the narrative. He is old and teaches languages, including English poetry. Yet, there is no mention of his actually being English, a point that is further enhanced by Conrad's mention of the narrator's "Western Eyes," which are not necessarily equivalent to English eyes (*UWE* 282). Thus, the teacher remains a man without a country and without an identity tied to any nation in particular. He is rather free to choose to be Western and does so throughout the novel. He never chooses to be a Russian, though his upbringing near St. Petersburg may have given him license to stake his claim to a degree of Russianness. He may be familiar with all these cultures, but has chosen to be veiled, just as Conrad had chosen to keep his narrator an indeterminable personage.

The manner in which impressions function in the case of the narrator's identity can then be assumed to apply to the manner in which he tells the story. He is an active participant beginning with Part Second and does not relinquish his place of prominence at any time thereafter. He does give room for Razumov's and Natalia's points of view at times, however. But these as well are filtered through him and he reminds us of the fact from time to time. Thus, all the reader knows is filtered through this character, who also functions as an obsessive narrator who may or may not be sufficiently equipped to carry out the task. Let us assume that the narrator's qualifications are adequate, or "sufficient for what is attempted here" (*UWE* 3). In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the narrator and his predicament – albeit a predicament unaddressed within the novel outright – it may be useful to look at Conrad's life experience. It is the formulation of self-identity, that is of a personal geography, and its transference to a fictional character as a form of apologetic explanation that will concern us in the following section.

IV. Homo-Duplex: Joseph Conrad's Invention of the Self and the Familiar Ground

"His works would always be spiritually autobiographic in that, as author, he could be the 'figure behind the veil'" wrote Walter F. Wright in his introduction to Conrad's writings on fiction (Wright xi). Wright seems to translate and clarify Conrad's thoughts on the function of the writer that Conrad had set down in his "A Familiar Preface" to *A Personal Record*. And, although the author claims the following volume of

biographical writing does not present “any such veil,” Wright correctly ascertains its consistent presence. With *Under Western Eyes*, the veil device seems to become thinner and more transparent. In the figure of the Teacher this does not seem entirely effective in shrouding the writer from public scrutiny. According to Pen R. Szittyá “[t]he old language teacher is a patent masquerade by an author pretending loudly to be someone he is not” (*Metafiction: The Double Narration in Under Western Eyes* 823). So, what is the author who never seems to be quite the whole of an author and always something more at once?

It is possible to argue, as Wright does, that Conrad’s fiction had always been autobiographical, and it seems no great stretch when one compares the works’ subjects to Conrad’s experiences. Just as Conrad had been to the Congo and based *Heart of Darkness* upon his experiences there, so he had been an exile, a virtually shipwrecked Slav in East Anglia and must have faced as high a degree of misunderstanding in character and custom as Yanko Gooral experiences in the story “Amy Foster.” And though Yanko is a shipwrecked passenger, one might argue that it still is a story of the sea or a tale of exploration, perhaps. What is being explored are not foreign – to the British and therefore to the language of the target audience – lands, but rather the English homelands by an outside agent, a technique Conrad also used to illuminate the possibility of experience when making the comparison between London and the Congo through Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*.

This manner of drawing parallels between one place and another suggests a purview not entirely settled within a single culture or a single way of perception. Rather,

it is the view of one *outside* who is firmly placed *within* a culture at once. It is a telling from two, or more, possible vantage points; a telling from a perspective that had once been disparagingly regarded as cosmopolitan. But such a view is not only cosmopolitan, since this would imply that its possessor, in this case Conrad, has come to it from a position of privilege within a single, settled society, that is, from a single socio-cultural geography. Conrad's case, like the manner of his telling and veiling, is much more complex.

Though Conrad's background may be considered one of privilege within the social hierarchies of partitioned Poland, such privilege turned to disadvantage due to his father's nationalist activities. Accompanying his exiled father and mother to the Russian Vologda region¹¹ when he was nearly five, Conrad underwent his first exilic experience. Just as a cosmopolitan view of the world might be formed by an internationalist outlook, so might an exilic one. The two do not differ on that level. Yet concerns implicit to both forms of perception and thought differ substantially. Conrad's first exilic experience was certainly formative and must have played a crucial role in his unmooring from the bounds of a settled and defined, albeit in terms that were anything but comfortable, socio-cultural geography and in his transformation toward an international outlook. With the death of his mother and later his father, Conrad's unmooring became nearly complete. The ties that bound him to partitioned Poland – a country that did not legally exist – were all but dissolved, despite guardians and an extended family presence, when he was sent off to boarding school in Lvov. He had become a displaced person in his own right, an

¹¹ A region nearly equidistant to St. Petersburg as to Moscow.

“internal” exile.¹² To be in internal exile is only a step away from becoming an exile abroad. One must keep in mind that the idea of an internal exile for a Pole whose country had become absorbed within a larger empire cannot be considered truly internal. Many aspects of an internal exile, that is, an exile within one’s own culture and borders within that same country, are not applicable. Internal exile is something much like house arrest, whereas Conrad was thrown into the boundary waters and told to converse with dolphins instead. And so he chose to continue in that outward direction at the age of sixteen, having little prospect of a satisfactory life within the context of a partitioned Poland with its variant laws and upcoming military service. Perhaps to be a sailor had been preferable to being a soldier in service to a regime his father had opposed. Conrad had thus become a man in his own service: an exile of his own volition.

Let us return for a moment to the notion of impressions being formative of general life experience. Conrad’s life is often characterized by dates and events of import. Those dates – birth, death of parents, emigration/immigration and migration in general, marriage, death, etc. – make up a totality which we, as people of any kind, are likely to call a life. It is the Gestalt impression of such a life that the dates and events describe, yet never distinguish or describe other details. The important events are preserved as

¹² An internal exile does substantially differ from an exile abroad. In Conrad’s case, however, the notion of a boarding school in Lvov cannot be considered a true internal exile. The Ukraine was not a part of pre-partition Poland, though Ruthenia had been. So Conrad was not within the historical borders of Poland as such, but rather within the borders of greater Russia. He had been exiled there once before, under harsher circumstances. Yet, this familiarity with Russia or the Ukraine should not be construed as comforting. He was not in “his” country, so to speak. The majority population of that area was indeed Ukrainian and so the language differed substantially from the western Slav tongue of the Poles. Not only did the linguistic barrier present a level of remove from his homeland, but so did the cultural norms practiced by the local population. A tradition of Democratic – albeit through a ruling nobility – rule was absent in the Ukraine, while the region was heavily Russified, a cultural as well as linguistic remove was therefore at work here. (Ukrainian and Russian tend to be mutually intelligible, which then must point the discerning reader in a definite direction when speaking of Conrad’s linguistic abilities. He, of course, is known to have denied ever being able to speak Russian.)

episodic impressions, changeable and prone to reinterpretation, and it is these impressions that constitute what is perceived as a complete life. Though vivid, perhaps, the episodic impressions gained from living do not encompass its actual totality. Much is forgotten or omitted. Conrad's fiction is much like our lives, simply because of his awareness of how human experience of life functions. Such awareness may not have been as readily available to him had he not become alienated from the everyday of his original socio-cultural geography through exile. That is not to say that people settled in one town or place cannot arrive at such awareness, but only that to be forcibly removed from one's place serves to bring the experience to the fore of perception. Edward Said writes of Conrad's understanding: "[h]e believed that his life was like a series of short episodes (rather than a long, continuous, and orderly narrative) because he was himself so many different people, each one living a life unconnected with the others: he was a Pole and an Englishman, a sailor and a writer" (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* viii). This manner of perceiving the self had consequences for Conrad, in life as in his art.

From an episodic, disconnected series of events that Conrad perceived as his life must have arisen his artistic aesthetic which, like life, stressed the import of impressions. In the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* Conrad spelled it out openly for his readers and critics. Besides the often quoted mission "to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*," he also put forth the idea that "[f]iction – if it at all aspires to be art – appeals to temperament." Such temperament must be a fine tuned instrument in order to perceive the author's intent, while the "appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses" (*NN* xiii – xiv). He practiced this approach to

constructing fiction on a level that was new and in conversation with other practitioners of the art. Yet, his purview was not that of a single person, that is, of a person possessing a single socio-cultural geography. He remained a cosmopolitan exile twice over. He was a Pole and, willfully, an Englishman; a sailor and a writer (in a language he claims had adopted him, but was not his own); an immigrant and a nobleman. All these attributes, as impressionistic and episodic as they indeed are, make up the complex figure that we call Joseph Conrad. His was a consciousness of choice, never all components at once, for such an amalgamation would not have been possible to maintain while he wrote. Some part of him always had to recede well out of reach and watch as the writer-component and its immediate tributaries necessary for the writing of a particular story or upon a specific subject wrote.

Said discusses Conrad's obsession with determination as a form of empowerment for survival and the chaos which Conrad at times embraced within his letters to friends. It is through the vacillation between these extremes – controlled, logical will to power versus a chaotic self becoming ordered and again disordered as a matter of course – that we can perceive the type of struggle that must have taken place during the composition of his perhaps most difficult novel. *Under Western Eyes*, or perhaps not the book directly, but the experience of having to reveal more than he had wished to reveal, brought an emotional or psychic collapse to Conrad. This collapse also manifested itself in physical symptoms of what has been termed gout and fever by Jessie Conrad. The collapse, however, cannot be attributed entirely to the completion of the draft of *Under Western Eyes*. Zdislaw Najder, in *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, outlines another factor in

Conrad's life that may have had as much influence in causing the collapse. In response to Bernard Meyer's hypothesis of an "Infection-Exhaustion Psychosis," Najder argues:

It seems more likely that Conrad's illness was psychiatric from the beginning and that the physical symptoms were of a derivative nature. He had long been subject to depression, and in this case several causes coincided to bring it about: the sudden relaxation which usually followed the completion of a major work; financial difficulties; the shock caused by his row with Pinker; and – to my mind the most important – his emotional involvement in the contents of *Under Western Eyes*. (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 358)

What seems apparent from Najder's comprehensive approach to the illness that befell Conrad is that it could not have been caused by a single aspect of the situation. Financial issues were ever present, yet could not have caused the collapse alone. Involvement in the novel he had just finished may have pushed Conrad to the precipice of exhaustion, but that does not seem likely – even combined with the financial issue – to have been the final stroke that had put him out of commission. What seems the most important piece in the puzzle of his falling ill is the row with his agent, J. B. Pinker. Najder states that during Conrad's meeting with Pinker, as he delivered the rough manuscript of *Under Western Eyes*, a row ensued between writer and agent over contractual matters:

"Conrad's mounting irritation increased his usually strong accent or even made him use an incorrect expression. The agent, also aroused by the altercation, told him to speak English" (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 357). This was not, of course, the first time Conrad had been on the receiving end of such remarks. But it had been the first instance his agent had used such a manner of speaking with him; that is, his agent treated him as a

perpetual outsider, one who did not belong. Combined with the rest of the factors in his life, Conrad's outward illusion of belonging to the culture within which he resided and functioned as a novelist, as someone of a certain reputation and social standing, had been undermined once again. This at the very moment when he had just attempted to formulate for an audience the predicament in which one finds oneself as an exile; he was exiled – metaphorically and psychologically. Only this time it was not by a regime or a critic, but by his agent, someone on whom he had counted for much support and financial backing.

Since Conrad had worked so hard to obscure the narrator's origins and to make him as much a member of an English society that wasn't represented in the backdrop of Geneva, Pinker's retort must have hit a nerve in relation to Conrad's mental state especially heightened by the novel he had just delivered. It may have brought home to him a notion that he could not hide, that "the author has not disappeared." Rather that "[h]e is often highly visible behind his surrogate" as Scholes and Kellogg were to point out nearly sixty years later (*The Nature of Narrative*, 277). If the author was "highly visible" then, it was likely that such an author – one who could not speak English properly according to his literary agent – would also not have performed a proper masquerade and had not managed to "pass" for an Englishman. His veil had failed to obscure him. Thus, Conrad was relegated, once again, to the status of an exile – an exile from and within his own work – rather than a cosmopolite with British citizenship, the latter of which must have been preferable considering its implication of belonging. His narrator had not been a successful enough veil and so let too much of the author show. The bridge Conrad must have been attempting to build through the Teacher must not have adequately spanned the

necessary cultural barriers. The result was an illness for the author, full of feverish delusion and speaking in his native language while still managing to edit the manuscript into a different shape. Conrad was not yet finished in his attempt to explain the predicament of the exile through his narrator-agent.

Under Western Eyes presents the figure of the Teacher of Languages, who veils the author, as an alien hoping to succeed in veiling his own foreignness from his audience. This narrator, as has been discussed previously, is not an ideal narrator by any means. He is deceptive and rhetorically savvy in his claims to impartiality and lack of artfulness. His skills are “sufficient for what is attempted here” and yet he gives us very little reason to trust this assertion (*UWE* 3). In his deceptiveness, the narrator parallels his creator, who, according to numerous scholars such as Najder and Fleishman, had attempted to shape the way the reading public perceived him. The Teacher employs similar dissembling techniques in the manner of structuring the narrative that Conrad had employed in his Author’s note added to the 1920 edition of this novel. At the outset of Part Second, the narrator proclaims that “this is not a work of imagination; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its artlessness” in much the same manner that Conrad claims impartiality in the “Author’s Note” (*UWE* 75). Such impartiality might have been possible were it not for the claim made by the narrator “that I have no comprehension of the Russian character” (*UWE* 3). If the narrator does not understand the Russian character, then how can he interpret the actions of Russians or accurately translate Razumov’s diary? At the same time he readily admits his “limitations” but also claims that he is “strong in the sincerity of... purpose,” “would

not try to invent anything,” and pushes his “scruples so far that [he] would not even invent a transition” (*UWE* 75). Of course, the very statement is a transition. He is as sincere, perhaps in self-denial, as Conrad might have been in his denial of the ability to speak Russian or German, both of which languages had been necessary to him at one time or another during his childhood and adolescence. In the same manner that a degree of misdirection is employed by writer and narrator alike, this misdirection is not malicious. Rather, it is a symptom of a state of perception which Najder describes in terms of “[t]he teacher’s self-effacing remarks” that “express his occasional awareness that ‘his’ West is not what it ought to be” (*Conrad in Perspective* 137).

Perhaps it was as a symptom of his being tenuously accepted that, when Conrad faced Pinker’s retort to speak English, his awareness of himself as an Englishman of Polish extraction collapsed. His impressionistic view of life that could not be contained by a single label, such as Anglo-Polish might have provided, must have come crashing down around him. Perhaps this is the reason for the apparently extensive revision of the novel and the manner in which the Teacher is treated as an enigma of sorts. This narrator is nominally English and somewhat Russian, though he chooses to be Western. Again we are reminded of Najder’s injunction that Conrad is aware of his West being other than it ought. Similarly, Conrad was reminded by Pinker that his own Englishness was not what it ought to have been. Thus the veil in the novel just like the mask Conrad had so painstakingly created for himself were both demolished for the moment, probably causing Conrad to rebuild them in a more adaptable manner. Since both the Teacher and Conrad’s British persona were ‘creations’ he had willed into being, the method of

rebuilding them had to include minimizing of the Teacher's personal visibility within the novel. As Pen R. Szittyá aptly observed "[t]he fiction becomes the truth; the mask turns into the man" (*Metafiction: The Double Narration in Under Western Eyes* 837). So in order to avoid another attack on his public persona, Conrad not only minimized the teacher's visibility, but also his own by retreating to his illness.

Throughout this retreat, Conrad managed to escape any further reproach by Pinker or anyone else. In a sense, he emulated Razumov's flight from Russia. Just as Yael Levin points out that "[w]e must consider [...] that the narrator is a spy, and that the tale he tells is always already subordinated to the equally crushing gaze of the Westerner" so we must consider that the author faces a similar situation in regard to his public persona (*The Moral Ambiguity of Conrad's Poetics* 219-20). Yet, the public and the private spheres are not easily separated by the author. Episodic and disconnected as life may become, the psyche strives to hold itself together through a refashioning of identity: an identity of the self for public as well as private consumption. It is the conjunction of the two, especially to someone who makes his living in the public sphere, that must have created the issue, thus causing Conrad's collapse. His private notion of what he was must have culminated with his work on *A Personal Record*. While the *English Review* printed his essays, he, like Razumov, must have felt himself safer with each installment. He had revealed things about himself, yet in a manner that was geared to be palatable to his English sensibility and suddenly there he stood before Pinker, who swiftly destroyed that very sensibility with his command. Conrad's sense of self must have undergone an immediate crisis that began to manifest itself through physical symptoms. The very fact

of Conrad's willingness to present his reading public with pieces of his earlier life, as stylized and embellished as these must have been, seems to constitute a defining moment in his transition from being an exiled Pole to becoming the Englishman of Polish extraction which must have been his desired outcome. Michael Seidel, in *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, states that "many writers [...] have gained imaginative sustenance from exile [...] that experiences native to the life of the exile seem almost activated in the life of the artist: separation as desire, perspective as witness, alienation as new beginning" (Seidel x). It is precisely the issue of a new beginning that we must consider in Conrad's exilic predicament.

As has been mentioned in regard to his story "Amy Foster," Conrad was aware of the exclusionary nature of English society during his time. He may have been a sailor in the merchant marine, thus paying his entry dues to English society. Yet he had wanted a public life as a novelist and so had to refashion himself in order to become more palatable to his fellow English citizens. Since his accent was prominently noticeable, his only way of obtaining acceptance was through the means of the pen and print. It seems to be agreed upon by critics that *A Personal Record* is such an attempt. Edward Said is of the opinion that "[Conrad] was able to see that his own past [was] crystallized and translated into the mock-biography *A Personal Record*" (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 79). If the collection, written concurrently with *Under Western Eyes*, is a mock-biography, the chances that Conrad's preoccupation with not only refashioning himself but also with explaining his predicament played a foremost role in his creative and biographical efforts. Conrad's aims and complications with autobiography will be the

subject of later discussion. It is important, however, to stress the correlation between the two volumes: *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*.

Thus the narrator is a spy, as pointed out by Yael Levin, and also an entity, albeit fictional, which serves to veil the actual “spy,” who is the author himself. But let us rephrase this formulation in a more favorable, as well as useful, light. The teacher (narrator) is a veil for Conrad in *Under Western Eyes* in that he allows the author to communicate generalizations and observations about Russian culture in a manner that is meant to be simplified enough for those readers belonging to a Western (English) culture. He functions as a translator and interlocutor between these cultures yet remains veiled himself. His origin is unknown and fashioned in such a way that the reader never finds out exactly where the teacher comes from or of what extraction he might be. He simply exists in the environs of Geneva, teaching English poetry to Miss Haldin and, presumably, to other students. Yet, for the purposes of this novel, no other students are mentioned and no allusions are made to the rest of his history. Therefore the teacher is the perfect spy, even more so than Razumov, whose background seems fleshed out to a fuller degree.

While the teacher is a perfect spy without much for cover, Conrad writes a series of essays and reminiscences of his Polish background. Within the biographical work, rather than a spy, his function is that of an interpreter: of himself and of his culture. Thus the two books are distinct, while also utilizing complimentary approaches to the issue of origin and national predicament. In *Under Western Eyes* we see a narrator whose sole function is to interpret and translate, thus creating a cultural bridge between the East and

the West. In *A Personal Record* we find the writer as the interpreter of his own life and background, functioning as a bridge between an occupied Poland – his original homeland – and his adopted England. The interpretation within the latter volume is perhaps more immediately valuable to the writer himself: to his psychological well being and acceptance within that adoptive society, than in an attempt to contribute to the Polish cause. It is in this distinction that we can see the value of the teacher of languages, not only as he narrates the novel, but also as an agent or spy for the Western audience for whose understanding he interprets the meanings of Russian autocracy and its effects on the indigenous population under its rule. What's more, the narrator also relates the events of an exilic community that pines for and conspires to affect change in Russia. But this community is not homogeneous. It is within this particular context that it becomes necessary to address the issue of the Haldin women in particular.

During their introduction at the outset of Part Second, the teacher uses the term “emigrated” in reference to the Haldin women. This is indicative of a difference in their reasons for and attitudes about leaving Russia. They had no previous part of their own in the political conspiracies within Russia and, at Victor Haldin's behest, had left their country to live in Switzerland – a country we may term Western. Based upon an understanding of the word “emigrated,” we can assume that the ladies had meant to remain in the West and to refrain from any participatory involvement with the revolutionists' machinations. In short, they had intended to assimilate to the best of their abilities, a probability bolstered by the fact of their contracting the narrator in order for Miss Haldin to “go through a course of reading the best English authors with a competent

teacher” (*UWE* 75). There seems to be little information to suggest that the ladies had meant to return to Russia at this point. Perhaps that was one of the reasons that had drawn Peter Ivanovich to pursue Natalia Haldin in order to activate her nationalism and revolutionary zeal. By the novel’s conclusion, Natalia does, of course, return to work for change in Russia. Still, it is not the Haldin ladies’ initial intent to do any such thing. Here they are posited as regular – by this I mean non-revolutionary – exiles attempting to make a life in the West. They seem to be foils meant to highlight the difference between the Russian or Eastern exile and the narrator, who had presumably left Russia early enough not to have the same temperament as other Easterners.

The doubling between Razumov and the Teacher suggested by Levin must be expanded to include the Haldin ladies. Whereas Razumov and the Teacher are doubles of one another in the capacity of spies, the Haldin ladies and the Teacher double as different aspects of émigrés or exiles. Perhaps the greatest difference in their parity is made up by age; the teacher styles himself old, but not too old, while the mother seems to be old – though this is extremely unlikely – and acts the part. Natalia, on the other hand, has life before her and can make the choice between assimilating to a Western mode of understanding and thought, just as the teacher seems to have done, or to revert to a revolutionary nationalism and abandon her voluntary exile. Thus Natalia is full of possibilities and, despite her return to Russia, seems to retain a modicum of that capability. Her person remains idealistic enough on the level of familial and romantic devotion while also possessing the ability to see her surroundings and homeland with a

philosophical remove. Thus her ability might be one of ‘negative capability’ based on her uncommitted state of being and ability.

The teacher had either made his choices or had somehow been spared the decision and so remains an exile within the confines of Geneva. The manner of his outlook within the novel is forcibly Western and thus limited. He translates and narrates but does not seem to divulge more than is necessary. He is a perfect spy, in the sense that he acts as interpreter to both societies. He is a cultural bridge between them, having been born (presumably) of both. His reticence may be a signal for the reader to look closer at his background or to look past the veil to the author’s own predicament.

Just as Conrad “had managed till now to keep his nightmare of a life in deceptive but convenient order,” so the teacher manages to order his life in a manner that reflects nothing of himself (Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 67). Perhaps Conrad had wanted to reveal as little as the Teacher. ““Reality” was merely what one made for oneself” (Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 67). And Conrad had chosen to reveal much during the years of writing *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*. Pinker’s comment was a slap in his face, a thing every exile must not only deal with at some point, but also fears. When one expects it least and forgets, that is the moment during which a comment of such a nature can destroy an exile’s self-constructed identity and send it reeling back into a nightmare of uncertainty. During such a time of destruction, it is impossible for the exile to maintain not only the public function of bridging the cultures of origin and residence, but also to maintain that bridge for oneself. The investments in the social structures around one either help one to

reconstruct the self and bridge the divide or, if such personal ties are missing, the opposite may occur. Conrad was in search of a provisional ground, according to Amar Acheraiou, instead of attempting to remap his geographies in a progressive manner. Thus he always wrote with Poland in the back of his mind. Establishing the provisional geography of his own existence must also have meant the creation of a provisional persona. This is the exilic medium or bridge that spans both sets of experience for an exile. In Conrad's case, this bridge seems more like a viaduct with off ramps and lanes that run in many directions over an abyss. They include his now famous *homo-duplex* persona of sailor/writer and Pole/Englishman. These pairs alone, however, cannot explain his reaction or what he had attempted to accomplish within the framework of *Under Western Eyes*. An exile's effort at creating a provisional geography becomes more difficult when such parities multiply to include experiences not so common to all exiles and émigrés.

From the doubling of experiences and personae and the variations discussed above regarding the Teacher and Razumov, or Natalia Haldin and the Teacher, one can conclude that Conrad was indeed attempting to be as specific as possible in his attempt at revealing his 'private' person to his (English) reading public. This specificity was carefully calibrated to show the different types of choices the author was forced to face, while also explaining that those choices existed, and that emigration and exile were often more complex than the general public perception and interpretation might indicate. His effort, however, met with limited success. A review by Frederic Taber Cooper in the December issue of *The Bookman* seems to speak to the heart of the difficulty:

[...] he still retains, in spite of years of wandering and additional years of literary life in England, essentially the Slav attitude of mind, the Slav outlook upon life. [...] He clothes his thoughts not in incorrect English [...] but in *different* English. [...] the clothing of Mr. Conrad's thoughts is essentially of foreign cut, necessarily and properly so, because they are designed to fit thoughts which are also born abroad. [...] the chief purpose of the book is to interpret one nationality to another, to reveal and explain the spirit of Russia to Western Europe. (440-41)

Perhaps Cooper had intended to be kind to Conrad's literary and social standing, and seems to have managed this feat pretty well, while also pointing out the Slav nature of the author's thought. What is of utmost import here is the compliance of the critic with the narrator's apparent mission. Though Conrad does not publish his "Author's Note" for another nine years, one can hear within Cooper's review the echoes of what Conrad will write. "What I was concerned with mainly was the aspect, the character, and the fate of the individuals as they appeared to the Western Eyes of the old teacher of languages" (*UWE* 282). Thus Conrad is concerned with his characters' appearance to the Western Eyes of the teacher, not the Western Eyes of the reader, which we might consider a great difference in light of Cooper's review. Since the writer and characters alike are of Slavic extraction, even the Teacher may therefore be a Slav and, as such, may think as a Slav omitting his Slav perspective from the storytelling purview as much as he is able. He may not be able to escape it, however, and is forced to wear a cloak of compliance with a simplified western mode. For reasons of comprehension, the teacher pretends not to understand the thoughts expressed or the twists of action his characters display. Simply stated, he plays dumb so that his readers might follow and empathize with him. It is the

establishment of a provisional ground upon which all involved – narrator, characters, and readers – can function simultaneously to understand the events taking place, at the very least, in their rudimentary functionality. That is, the narrator tries to have his story understood on the surface level. All else is spy-work, as Yael Levine has suggested in his 2007 *Conradiana* article. Thus, to have the author and his proxy, the teacher, think in any but a cosmopolitan manner, which is necessarily foreign to the settled British temperament of understanding, is unthinkable as Cooper aptly intimates. A quality foreign to the settled sensibility is this provisional ground which is necessarily natural to Conrad himself. He is therefore attempting his best as a cultural bridge, yet he remains unreliable to a high degree. Still, his unreliability is less apparent on the surface level than in the manner of its presentation, which in turn shows the rift between the story's surface and its underlying components.

The surface level of understanding is of the greatest importance to the story being told, since it is that upon which all parties can agree to a great enough extent and keep the reader engaged. Those levels of meaning that are less apparent within the same pages are explored by Jaques Darras in his study *Joseph Conrad and the West: Signs of Empire*. Darras does not engage in the type of sentimentalism of which Conrad tends to be accused or in charging Conrad with being overly Slavonicist, a charge leveled against him by critics such as Cooper. According to Darras, Conrad's "language seems to be destined not so much for translation as for duplicity" (3-4). He gives Conrad credit for designing his writing in *Under Western Eyes* in a duplicitous manner, rather than viewing this heteroglossia as an impediment. The language used is difficult for the surface story

that supposedly highlights or attempts to unveil things Russian for the readers. It also retains several sets of possibilities beneath the surface story, which is a semantic truth doubled with a semantic lie regarding most events and characters, including the narrator. Yet, this is not entirely what Darras has in mind. He also insists that "... it would be useless to look for another origin for the author apart from his own writing, for he was less anxious about the points of anchorage than about the effect which the writing produces. That is why it is quite absurd to look for them, as some persist in doing, out of cultural nationalism, in the country called Poland" (4).¹³ Thus, Conrad must have created himself as a public persona through his writing, only on occasion using his Polish heritage as a prop or as something that might set him apart from the pool of common English writers. This is particularly apparent in his rewriting of himself in *A Personal Record*. Yet again, Conrad's Polish heritage may seem a prop to a Western critic while it is deeply interwoven in Conrad's personal geography and through it in his writing in general and biographical writing on an even deeper level as we shall later see.

The question of the author who is veiled by his narrator in *Under Western Eyes* must necessarily include the author's use of his background for telling the surface story

¹³ Though as much may be true – that Conrad did not actually anchor himself in the traditions and mentality of Poland, he did anchor himself in the ideas of his background according to Zdislaw Najder. Yet, it also may be the case that some parts of his national heritage had become invisible to the Western eyes of any and all critics, who, in our modern, multiculturalist era tend to discount the importance of mere cultural divisions within the seemingly racially uniform European continent. Unless the subject is Roma or Jewish, the discussion is not as interesting as it might be if the subject comes from a historically colonized country of the old European empires. This perception, one which posits a lack of diversity or colonialism on the European continent proper, is erroneous and founded on purely misconceived notions of what it may mean to be a multicultural society. To begin with, a society does not have to include many skin tones or radically disparate religious beliefs in order to be a multicultural one. It is enough to mix closely related religious belief systems and languages that are, at root, closely related as well in order to set up a widely diverse cultural society. One need not look farther than the Balkan countries which had once made up the state of Yugoslavia. It is not the Muslim component which concerns us in this example; enough trouble brewed between the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Christians, whose languages are closely related and, so far as linguistic conventions are concerned, are virtually identical, save for the type of alphabet they use.

while divulging the particular existential state of someone who has indeed found his provisional geography. Perhaps the teacher is Conrad's ideal of an exile settled in his provisional space and able to become a teacher, thus an interpreter, of one culture for another. In effect, he paints an impression of what a "cultural bridge" might look and act like, albeit not as reliable as one might hope for, thanks to the semantics of truths employed.

The similarities between the teacher and Conrad himself are striking enough to merit their delineation. Whereas Conrad had been born in the Russian-controlled territories of partitioned Poland, the teacher was "born from parents settled in St. Petersburg," a city Conrad may never have visited, yet one that is roughly equidistant from Vologda and Moscow (*UWE* 138). The teacher "had acquired the language as a child" and had later "renewed [his] acquaintance with the language" (*UWE* 138). Conrad had also left the Russian lands as a "child" once his mother had died. He is said to have claimed no knowledge of the Russian language, but it is fairly certain that he did have contact with it and probably had to develop a rudimentary conversational proficiency. Conrad's protestations to the contrary might be viewed in the same light as his claims to possess no ability to speak German, which were refuted by his widow and son in their respective memoirs. To consider his linguistic ability further, one might wish to examine population maps of the era which show a predominance of Ukrainian and Russian language speakers in the Lvov area. The city of Lvov itself, however, had been populated by speakers of many languages. Polish, German, and Yiddish were just as common as Ukrainian, which does not preclude everyday contact with the last. It is fairly self

explanatory that the Kiev region – where Conrad had stayed with his father for a brief time – would, even at that time, have been populated mostly by speakers of Ukrainian, an eastern Slav language that is, by and large, mutually intelligible to Russians¹⁴.

Thus, both the teacher and Conrad himself have experiences of Russia and Russian rule during their formative years, and neither wishes to divulge any more than is necessary in order to have their audience comprehend the situation. The teacher does this by evading Razumov's probing and Conrad by refashioning his past through public documents, such as those in *A Personal Record*. It might be curious to have Conrad answer Razumov's stated question, which is not truly a question but a statement in search of affirmation. "But you are an Englishman – a teacher of English literature [...] People told me you have lived here for years". To this, the teacher assents: "Quite true. More than twenty years" (*UWE* 138).

He does not answer to being an Englishman, but admits to having resided in Geneva for a length of time. He does divulge the obvious and pertinent in the story: that is that he has "been assisting Miss Haldin with her English studies" (*UWE* 138). Thus the affirmation is only partially completed. The truth of his origin is never revealed. His parents were only "settled in St. Petersburg" which could mean any number of things, including that they were Russian or Jewish (*UWE* 138). When it comes to Conrad in this comparison, we might conclude that at the time of writing *Under Western Eyes* Conrad

¹⁴ An aspect of these linguistic variations concerns regional dialects, some of which may have been closer to Polish than to Russian, such as those around Lvov, compared to those around Kiev, which may have been more akin to Russian. Some of the dialects must also have been heavily influenced by German, as, no doubt, was the case of most of Western Poland, the Danzig region, and Silesia. Once again, this is based on geographic proximity and colonial expansions by both the Russians and Germans during that time and on the historical ranging of ethnically diverse populations. Lvov itself was multilingual, having a majority Polish and Jewish populations, with large minorities of Ukrainians and Germans.

had been based in England for more than twenty and closer to thirty years. His Englishness might have been provisional, just as his personal geography had been. Yet he managed to invest those aspects of himself within the narrator and to have the narrator act as a veil billowing in a slight breeze. Behind it we can see the author's outline, yet some distortion necessarily interferes with seeing him clearly. The veil does not have to be removed since it may just be an ideal figure that Conrad had wished to paint.

Thus Conrad attempts to 'normalize' his biographical experiences and use the knowledge and understanding of the Eastern and Western European cultures he had gained through his experiences to act as a go-between in a novel. Furthermore, he uses the same experiences to fashion a public persona for himself through the series of reminiscences later compiled and published as *A Personal Record*. This public persona is problematic in the same manner that the truths contained in *Under Western Eyes* are true only because they are presented as such. Yet, it is a persona that is more palatable to Conrad's English speaking audience. It makes it possible for him to divulge certain things about himself to the readers who are always interested in the private lives of their favorite literary figures, while keeping back the truths he would rather not face himself. The two contemporaneously written volumes belie a similar approach to the creation of a public self, while in the public eye, and also attempt to bridge the cultural gap. Likewise, both volumes create an invisible cultural distance from both the East and the West. Perhaps we can term that gap in Conrad's writing Central Europe, or, perhaps more accurately, the mind set which originates in that geographic space.

V. The Writer and the Narrator: Conrad's Normalizing Efforts through the Fiction of *Under Western Eyes*

Conrad's choice of the Teacher of Languages for a narratorial veil within *Under Western Eyes* allowed him to reduce the amount of personal information that would have been contained within the novel. Still, the manner in which the Teacher was constructed necessarily left some marks of Conrad's experience and predicament. The Teacher was the very basic sketch of Conrad's exiled self. The elements common between the two were not a few: both had been brought up in Russian territories during their early childhoods; both had spent time becoming English, somehow; the parents of both were no longer living, so far as one can discern from the sketch that is the Teacher; and both were comfortable with their Swiss environs. Conrad must have reduced the similarities between himself and the Teacher for the purpose he had outlined in his "Author's Note". He "tried to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality." This required "a greater effort of detachment – detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal memories" of him (*UWE* 281). It also sanitized the persona of the Teacher to the point that he had become the perfect assimilated exile or the perfect spy.

We cannot discern how exactly this English-speaking persona interacted with other "Westerners" in Geneva or elsewhere, since the action and Teacher's interaction is

limited to the Russian set. Thus, he is the sole source of information on which the reader must rely to be sufficiently accurate and fulfill Conrad's reported mission as an interpreter bridging the cultures of the East and the West. Yet, as Zdislaw Najder points out: "the narrator's 'eyes' are looking from an angle which is not quite representative of the European West of the time" (*Conrad in Perspective* 135). Furthermore, the narrator makes no direct claim to being Western. He does "mention that [he has] lived for a long time in Geneva" but that alone cannot be interpreted as *being* a westerner (*UWE* 3). We, the readers, are expected to fill in whatever is suggested based upon this minimal amount of information.

The perspective from which the Teacher seems to operate, however, feels exotic enough, yet rooted in a western, or westernized, space. Conrad might have chosen the locale for the bulk of the action very wisely. With Geneva as its backdrop and the Teacher as narrator who had lived there for "a long time," the possibility of some differentiation between the outright English and general Western purview is likely. Conrad uses this difference to his advantage in masking his narrator further, allowing him to pass for a Westerner. The veiling works so well that some critics have referred to the Teacher as the Old English Teacher of Languages, as we have seen in previous discussion.

Though the impetus for such a well-defined conclusion about the Teacher's identity is presented within the novel by its characters, we are given no solid evidence for its basis. The ground upon which Conrad had built his narrator and which he uses as the setting upon which to unfold the novel's story is provisional. That is, Geneva is neither

the British West nor the Russian East. It allows for a modicum of noticeable difference from the West and for the safety of a Western system within which the Russian drama can take place.

Since we do know, by the Teacher's own admission, that he was "born from parents settled in St. Petersburg" we cannot ignore the implication of Russian jurisdiction having some sway over him. In short, the teacher may well be subject to the Russian autocracy himself. His "having left for good as a boy of nine" cannot sever such ties without further action on his part (*UWE* 138). This fact does not necessarily indicate that he is a Russian by nationality, but that it is probable that he is a subject of the Russian crown. His parents' nationality is never given, yet that is no reason to assume they were either English or Russian. They could have been Polish just as easily. We can be quite certain, however, that the Teacher does not wish for us to explore his actual origin. He seems content enough to play the translator and Teacher of English poetry. His sense of himself and his political perspective is closely aligned with a West that is not quite English, but that is "Western in complexion" (*PR* ix). Such a sense of existence within a given space must correspond to what Amar Achareiou calls a provisional personal geography.

The need to maintain oneself within at the same time as outside of a culture that is not one's own corresponds closely with the experience of exile. It is the Teacher's lot to be a part of the Genevan landscape, while also being thoroughly distinct from it. He operates within the city as if it were his home, yet he does not seem to be a part of its sleepy culture. We must keep in mind that the culture is portrayed through his eyes and

pen. Therefore, it is not necessarily as sleepy or ignorant of the drama that unfolds within it. Rather, whatever the social fabric and culture of Geneva may or may not perceive is omitted from the novel by its narrator. Unlike the unquestioning city, he seems to prefer the company of and discussions with Natalia Haldin to the reportedly serene Geneva society that, to him, is completely silent. His involvement with the Russians may then be a type of thrill-seeking curiosity or a part of his heritage manifesting itself.¹⁵ The result, for the purposes of his existence as an entity within a given space, is his sharing of the exiled Russians' provisional status. Yet, while they seem to be focused on Russia and Russian matters, the Teacher has already created a personal geography from which he can operate. His involvement with the Russian community may fascinate him on one level, but also serves to fulfill his need for contact with his place of origin. His geography is not defined by any type of polarity; that is, he is not drawn away from it in either the direction of his childhood Russia or of his presumed homeland, England. He seems to be content in Geneva, which is a place that is not a part of either culture. Thus, the personal geography the Teacher utilizes is provisional while enduring. He is, in other words, in what appears to be a self-imposed state of exile. We do not obtain any information whatever regarding his reasons for living in Geneva, just as we get precious little biographical information that may help to explain the Teacher's character to us. He is an entity whose sole purpose is to relate to us the events and attitudes present within the story, or, at least, that is what Conrad has made possible on the surface.

¹⁵ "Immigrants begin a new life and find a new home; exiles never break the psychological link with their point of origin. Among the features of exile must thus be included the coercive nature of the displacement, its religious or political motivation, and the exiled's faith in the possibility of homecoming." Pavel, Thomas. "Exile as Romance and as Tragedy." *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*. 25-36. Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998.

Below the veneer of impartiality, the Teacher's correspondence with his creator is unmistakable. Perhaps that is why Conrad had sanitized this veil of any more than the essentials needed to convey the story and the ideas behind it. In his "Author's Note" Conrad writes that the Teacher "has been much criticized; but I will not at this late hour undertake to justify his existence. He was useful to me, and therefore I think that he must be useful to the reader both in the way of comment and by the part he plays in the development of the story" (*UWE* 282). He does not address any aspect of the Teacher's persona that is not seen impacting the story directly. Passing him off as being "useful" minimizes the magnitude of the impact the Teacher's existence and personal traits have on the novel. It seems that Conrad had attempted to maintain not only a type of "detachment" in his own process of writing but also in the manner that his veil, the Teacher, is being used. The writer's personal approach to the book seems to be mirrored in the "usefulness" of the narrator. The narrator becomes nothing but a pen through which the story can be channeled onto a page. He seems to have little impact, if we trust what Conrad has laid out in the "Author's Note." Still, if the narrator is only a tool then he is being used to veil the creator, since a mere tool would lack personality and the Teacher is nothing if not a mysterious stranger with idiosyncrasies aplenty. Maintaining that he is a tool being wielded by Conrad suggests a stock figure without the complexities of personality seemingly present. It suggests a pure piece of cardboard or gauze. If we remove that veil, what must be discovered behind it is the author caught in an admission of having masqueraded himself under a pseudonym.

It may be unfair to point at Conrad, the author of *Under Western Eyes*, and assume that it is the same Conrad who is portrayed within this novel. Rather, it is the reflection or impression of an earlier Conrad, perhaps of the author of *Almayer's Folly*, who is hidden behind this narratorial veil. The aspects of the author of *Almayer's Folly* used in creating the persona of the Teacher of Languages are not the same that Conrad uses in creating his persona of Conrad, the author of *Almayer's Folly*, that he uses in creating quite a different version of that same author in writing *A Personal Record*. Rather, Conrad is selective in which traits of that era of his life he wishes to display and which mask he presents to his readership in what type of work. The personal geographies in each of these simultaneously written works are not necessarily divergent, however. Rather, they are components from which the larger whole of the author is made up. Or, in other words, they are impressions intentionally disconnected and presented separately to his readership in order to achieve a desired effect fitting for each of the works.

If we examine the Teacher closely, we find correlations that Conrad (author of *UWE*) could not expunge from the narrator of the novel, that is, from the Conrad of *AF*, lest the story fall apart. Above the bare minimum of similarities between Conrad and his narrator already outlined, the issue of Geneva as the periodic setting of both aspects of narrator and writer Conrad's life must be considered.

The setting of Switzerland in general seems to gain a romantic sheen in Conrad's writing. In *A Personal Record*, it is the location within which he finds the English engineers at a mountain inn and is thoroughly impressed by their social economy.

Through the events that take place at the Furca Pass, the setting of Switzerland gains the stature of a place where Conrad can free himself from conventions and obligations. It seems to become his first self-made provisional geography. He must still return to his 'regular' life and fight the appropriate battles, but he has gained enough strength on his own terms to succeed. In other words, Switzerland is pliable and free so that Conrad can free himself there and so that that victory can enter into those geographies of the rest of his life that are not of his own making.

It is no surprise that Conrad came to the Genevan suburb of Champel-les-Baines in 1891 when he had returned from the Congo and required further treatment for the illness he had acquired in Africa. He repeated his stays in 1894, the year in which his uncle, Tadeus Bobrowski died and his last assignment to a sailing vessel expired, and again in May 1895, shortly following the publication of *Almayer's Folly*. It was during the latter of these sojourns that he met Emilie Briquel, a twenty-year old woman from a wealthy, bourgeois family on vacation with her mother. The two developed an attachment to one another, which later came to nothing despite there being ample suggestion of a possible long term relationship or marriage.

Najder enumerates the culturally oriented interests that Conrad and Emilie Briquel shared, among them literature. She was impressed by his being an author, while Conrad did not reveal his Polish heritage, leading her to assume that he indeed was an English novelist and gentleman. Briquel took English lessons in order to read his work in its original and had hoped to translate *Almayer's Folly* into French as a long term goal. Conrad had given her incentive in presenting to her an inscribed copy, a rather romantic

gesture considering the text of the inscription. Yet, he also had reservations regarding Briquel's proficiency in English and declined to have her perform the translation.

Although the affair seemed to lose intensity over time and with Conrad's remove, it must have left a lasting mark on him. Najder cautiously speculates on the effects the failure of this romance might have had on Conrad's future. As has been discussed, shortly following the letter in which Conrad was notified of Emilie Briquel's engagement, he proposed marriage to Jessie George and sent his own notice to the Briquels. Jocelyn Baines, in his *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*, speculated about Conrad's possible attachment to his aunt by marriage, Marguarite Poradowska, with whom he had maintained a rather intimate correspondence over the years and who had also been a novelist in her own right. The fact that Briquel had intended to translate his novel, a work on which Conrad had proposed to collaborate in translating with Poradowska before its publication in English, and Conrad's evidently having romantic interest in Briquel, seems to point at a confusing web of emotional and creative interests. The collusion of these seems to have left its mark on him. In his letter to Edward Garnett dated 7th June 1895, Conrad seems to be feeling the complications his romantic attachment(s) have added to an already complex web of existence. He writes: "Don't you think, dear Garnett, I had better die? True – there is love. That is always new – or rather startling being generally unexpected and violent – and fleeting. Still, one must have some object to hang his affections upon – and I haven't" (Garnett 38). Though the passage is surrounded by a text that gives off the notion of emptiness, within these lines Conrad seems to indicate a maelstrom of emotion and difficulty. It seems likely that not only did he know his

feelings for the younger woman had dampened his relationship with Poradowska, but that having involved himself in both, he had lost his long-standing friend. Any notion of a collaboration with Poradowska seems to have been scattered by the maelstrom of his infatuation with Emilie Briquell, thus his personal life had interfered rather than advanced the one thing which could sustain him: his art.

Najder speculates that the likelihood that Conrad's shady business dealings, combined with his having allowed the assumption of his Englishness to stand had made it impossible for him to make any effort at following through on the relationship he had developed with Emilie Briquel.

As an effect of the failure of what seems to have been an ideal relationship between Briquel and himself – or, perhaps because of the failure of his relationship with Poradowska – Conrad reacted with haste, as documented by Jessie's accounts, and proposed marriage to a woman he was certain would not turn him down. Yet, Conrad has also been termed a romantic by many a critic and friend. It is entirely likely that his self-styled realist approach had broken down during his affair and the impression of an ideal romantic situation had never left him. Whatever else his feelings and subsequent actions may have been, he used the episode as the blueprint for creating the Haldins and re-creating his persona of that time. And so the readers of *Under Western Eyes* are presented with a narrator who is a self-styled Westerner with somewhat expansive knowledge of English literature and linguistic skills sufficient for the task at hand. His involvement in what might be termed the 'story proper', that of Razumov and Haldin, Razumov's spying for the Russian autocracy and his infernal plan to marry Natalia Haldin in order to

possess her soul, increases exponentially with the commencement of “Part Second” for two main reasons. Firstly, the story, if it is begun with events in Russia that chronologically follow those portrayed in its subsequent part, must be kept interesting for the reader to care. Since the Teacher is the character with whose voice the reader is by then familiar, it follows that he provides a sense of continuity, no matter the turns the story may take. In Conrad’s words: “I think that he must be useful to the reader both in the way of comment and by the part he plays in the development of the story. ... it seemed to me indispensable to have an eye-witness of the transactions in Geneva” (*UWE* 282). Of course, the story would not exist without his reporting it. The Teacher is indeed indispensable to the reader. His voice in comment carries the reader through a six-month backward jump. After this accomplishment, using a transition while disclaiming its function, he launches into his eyewitness function. The shift in time is a major pivot in this novel in that this is the point at which the reader is presented with a new story-line which ties into the existing one, but only in time. It is the teacher’s function to bring the two together for us.

The manner in which the Teacher brings together the two main story-lines seems to require his personal involvement within them. He becomes a major character without letting go of the story’s reins. Which leads to the second function the Teacher performs: he adds a third, competing story-line to the novel. In fact, he takes the center stage through introducing his relationship to the Haldin ladies. Despite all of his protestation to the contrary – which is also where most readers seem to find their reason for calling him ‘old’ – he becomes Natalie Haldin’s suitor. This situation seems to parallel Conrad’s

episode with the Briquels. The mother and daughter pair are in Geneva, while the brother is elsewhere and expected; the narrator speaks of English literature with the daughter, who is younger than he by approximately twenty years; mutual affections develop but the relationship is impossible because of age and circumstance, yet remains intense on a friendship level until the story's conclusion. Avrom Fleishman points out that "[t]he novel develops a dialectic between the often-quoted (but rarely interpreted) skepticism of the narrator and the serene idealism of Natalia Haldin" (*Conrad's Politics* 238). Such a dynamic can also be seen in Conrad's attachment to and exchanges with Emilie Briquel, though the exchanges may not have been of a political nature.

The Teacher's surface seems to mirror Conrad's assumed English persona of that time. He is essentially homeless, yet comfortable with Geneva. His childhood was spent partly in Russia, while the affinities he displays seem to be directed at his own version of the West, mainly the British kind. He never reveals exactly what he is, which, again, seems to mirror his conduct with the Briquels. And, in the end he is left gathering the snippets of news – a proper narrator's function at the conclusion of a novel – of what has become of the main players, without a mention of what will become of him. The Teacher continues simply to exist. No mention is made of a world outside of the story itself where he is concerned, which brings one to consider Conrad's notion "that a novelist lives in his work" (*PR* xv). This persona that Conrad displays in *Under Western Eyes* as the Teacher of Languages seems to be very much himself as is the author of *Almayer's Folly*, not too old but no longer young, and fully free to do as he likes. This time, however, he does not become embroiled in the situation to such a high degree as he had back in 1895. His exit

strategy was that of the novel. Yet, we must return to his homo-duplex and all of the inherent contradictions and dilemmas involved with being a homeless exile, which had returned to him with Pinker's invocation to speak English, if he could.

Though the emotional energy invested in creating the Haldins seems based on Conrad's own experience with the Briquels, Conrad, the Author of *Under Western Eyes*, seems to point beyond the comparison and toward something other in his correspondence. He models and positions the Teacher in a manner that reflects the anonymity of the place within which the story of the novel plays out. It is a perfect job of blending in with western sensibilities (as reported by the one doing the blending) for the purpose of bringing forth a story for a Western readership. The Teacher is a persona designed as a guide and interpreter, regardless of his romantic inclinations. His point of view in discussion and comment is Western if only "in complexion" (*PR* ix). It is Western enough to make comprehensible the concepts which Conrad is attempting to translate for the Western reader, though, as seems to be a consensus within recent criticism, he is still best understood by Poles.

While *Under Western Eyes* can be considered Conrad's "attempt to render ... the psychology of Russia itself" for the benefit of his Western audience, the levels on which this novel functions are not limited to its author's stated purpose (*UWE* 281). In his "Author's Note" Conrad claims to have in essence abdicated all personal attitudes and memories. Yet, the novel shows ample evidence that its author drew on personal experience and personal geographies of exile in order to compose its narrative. As an effect of Conrad's involvement with writing the novel, he became more vulnerable in his

sense of belonging, that is, in his personal geography, and therefore suffered a breakdown. This incident serves to suggest further that Conrad's involvement with the text of *Under Western Eyes* held for him an intensity that far surpassed that with which he approached other projects. This intensity points toward a supreme effort at coding within this text a rudimentary blueprint of a general exilic predicament Conrad experienced himself, while also suggesting the idea that such exilic existence serves to span the divide between the West and East European cultures. In order for this bridging to be possible, however, such an exile cannot be of one or the other cultural camp. His personal-cultural geography must originate in a third, hybrid space called Central Europe.

Chapter 4: Bridging the Channel

The Meandering Creation of a Constant and Impressionistic Identity in Conrad's *A Personal Record*

In the September 1924 issue of *The Bookman* Thomas Moulton wrote that “[b]iographical facts are of infinitely greater significance in [Conrad’s] case than they will be in the case of the majority of his contemporaries, when – and if – their lifework becomes a matter for retrospective survey” (302). Writing a piece that indeed qualified as a retrospective survey himself – Conrad had passed away the previous month – Moulton knew how precious factual matter concerning his subject was to come by. Conrad’s literary oeuvre may have been close to complete in publication. His prefaces and author’s notes had all been made public. Yet, they seemed to reveal little of the hard facts of the man’s life. Jessie Conrad had not yet published the first of her memoirs, nor had any major biographical effort been made as yet. All Moulton had to go on were the autobiographical writings Conrad had fashioned and the things generally known of him. Therefore his eulogy contains much about Conrad’s books and their roots in life at sea. He does recognize, however, that “an analysis of Joseph Conrad the artist [is] the only analysis an English student is justified in attempting” (304). The psychological dissection that Conrad had performed on his characters, their interior struggles and outward fates are

highlighted here as well. Yet, in spite of the insight Moulton may have possessed into the workings of Conrad's fiction, he did not have the tools available to the contemporary scholar. Despite Conrad's publishing several volumes of non-fictional writing, Moulton was left to conjecture in his search for facts.

Moulton was one of the many literary critics who experienced this predicament. In her piece commemorating Conrad's death, though writing from a writer's and not a critic's perspective, Virginia Woolf sketched him in the tones of what had by then become common knowledge: "[i]t was partly his Polish birth ... he had the most perfect manners, the brightest eyes, and spoke English with a strong foreign accent" (*Common Reader* 228). Those were, indeed, some of the facts, albeit heightened for effect. Woolf continues to weigh the merits of Conrad's work, focusing mostly on his sea stories and novels, and on Marlow. The information with which she and others could have evaluated Conrad's life in greater perspective seemed to be lacking once more.

The reader is granted a certain amount of knowledge through Conrad's novels, yet the most popular of them do not focus on his roots. Conrad avoided writing of Poland and Poles in his fiction, with very few exceptions. Many speculations have been made as to the reason for such studied avoidance of things Polish, even while he endeavored in the attempt to investigate and reveal "things Russian" to his readership through fiction. Yet, it can be argued that Conrad did indeed make several attempts to reveal his personality and background. The greatest sustained document of this effort is the volume of *A Personal Record*.

The first of the installments, later compiled and published under the separate titles of *Some Reminiscences* in Britain and *A Personal Record* in the United States, was begun during Conrad's work on "Razumov" (later retitled *Under Western Eyes*) in September of 1908. The project originated when F.M. Ford suggested to Conrad that he might want to contribute some reminiscences of his Polish past to Ford's new literary journal *The English Review*. There is some disagreement whether it was not Conrad's own impetus instead of Ford's offer to publish the personal writing that made Conrad begin work on autobiographical material. Conrad interrupted his work on "Razumov" to begin writing what became a series of seven personal essays. The work was stopped in the following year when Ford and Conrad quarreled over Conrad's contributions to *The English Review*. The reasons given for the cooling of relations between them range from a clash of personalities to the change in editorship of the review. *The English Review* was taken over by a Russian relative of Ford's and Conrad refused to cooperate with a Russian.

Rather than focusing on the issue of nationality as the source of their disagreement, Jessie Conrad points to Ford's domineering personality and haughty comportment that had driven a wedge between the men. In either case, Conrad left off writing at seven installments and despite his reported intent to begin a new section – the seven had been meant to make up the first part – he refused to write any more, claiming that this would ruin the thematic and artistic unity of the work. Therefore, as it stands, the final manuscript of *A Personal Record* is comprised of seven parts, "A Familiar Preface", and an "Author's Note" added to the 1919 edition.

There are a hundred and thirty eight pages of biographical essay, supplemented by eighteen pages of note and preface. Within these one hundred and fifty six pages, we should be able to find some biographical information regarding their author. Yet, well before the first line of the first part appears, we are confronted with Conrad's disavowal of the conventions of autobiography. In his "A Familiar Preface", Conrad states:

I was told severely that the public would view with displeasure the informal character of my recollections. "Alas!" I protested, mildly. "Could I begin with the sacramental words, 'I was born on such a date in such a place?' The remoteness of the locality would have robbed the statement of all interest. ... This is but a bit of psychological document, and even so, I haven't written it with a view to put forward any conclusion of my own." (PR xxii)

This denial of conventionality, an appeal to something other than what is expected of the writer of autobiography, does not only renege on the promise of the work containing a direct line from birth to the present. Its reasons for bucking the conventions of the genre encompass the convention of portraying the writer's self in a defined space and under a certain light of the writer's choosing. Instead, Conrad chooses to put forth not a factual, but a "psychological document" – much as he had endeavored to "render ... the psychology of Russia" in *Under Western Eyes* – without attempting to explain in plain language how such a document may constitute an autobiographical portrait (UWE 281). His words are echoed by Ford in the first lines of the memoir *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*. Ford's approach is indicative and, on an overt level, derived from Conrad's. He fills in the place and time, thus giving the reader something more concrete with which to work, yet from there on his approach is avowedly impressionistic.

Perhaps in a mirroring exercise of Conrad's efforts in his reminiscences, Ford compiles impressions (memories) and sets an agenda for his volume, an agenda which he reconfirms later in his volume. "We saw that life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render impressions" (*Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* 195). It seems likely that in wishing to "produce" on the reader "an effect of life" Ford may "render impressions" as blatantly truthful as they may be false. He was the literary companion, the collaborator, the confidant of Conrad's most productive years and so had access to much knowledge that others could never have accessed. It may very well be that Ford's restatement of a mission for the impressionistic nature of his own recollections is a signpost to the manner in which one might wish to read Conrad's reminiscences: as a series of impressions cobbled together to make a narrative whole while taking pains to avoid straight narration as such. The effect, not only of this type of autobiographical writing, but also approach to living – Conrad must have acted in his everyday as he wrote – was to lead his life-long friend Richard Curle to state that he was "very certain that no one really understood [Conrad]" (*Joseph Conrad: Ten Years After* 189).

And still critics have tried to understand some 'facts' about Conrad and his life. Many of these efforts have been successful, while others may have fallen short of the mark. Curle himself knew enough to claim that Conrad could never have permanently returned to Poland, despite some speculations to the writer's intent following the Great War. He also knew enough to conclude that "[Conrad] was, indeed, a great son of Poland and a great adopted son of England, but the two loyalties never clashed, because they

were on different planes” (*Joseph Conrad: Ten Years After* 199). In short, Curle was privy to knowing the nature of the man and being able to draw conclusions, albeit retrospective, as to Conrad’s nature and abilities on a social and personal level. He must also have known that there was no true way of knowing everything that fought for space and attention within such a man. How these things would manifest themselves in an outward manner, he felt able to foretell. Curle seems to concur with Conrad’s “A Familiar Preface”. “[...] I know that a novelist lives in his work” (*PR* xv). The question remains which of the works are closest to the novelist’s vest. With Conrad, it seems to be all of them. Curle may make a list of the ones he considers the masterpieces, yet also knows that a masterpiece may not be the equivalent to the most personal. Therefore we do not find on his list *A Personal Record* or *Under Western Eyes*.

Ford seems to avoid broaching the subject by maintaining the impressionistic mode of accounting for his experiences of and with Conrad. Ford’s and Curle’s are different venues with their own sets of requirements, however, and this gives Ford an edge with which to pursue, rather than account for, Conrad’s (and admittedly his own) style. It is in the imitative process of rendering a psychological impression of Joseph Conrad’s, the writer’s, life that the initial impetus to my reading of *A Personal Record* rests.

Speaking of Conrad’s style in *A Personal Record*, J.M. Kertzer suggests that its effect “is to keep the reader at a distance from Conrad the biographer, the novelist, and the sober man” (*Conrad’s Personal Record* 290). As to its factual details and overall effect, Kertzer writes that “the book is not profoundly personal and none too accurate a

record” (*Conrad’s Personal Record* 290). Given that in the preface to this work Conrad had pointed to his understanding of the “novelist” as living “in his work,” one can also refer to this particular work as an extension of that life in fiction. This notion is echoed in Kertzer’s article as well: “I believe that *A Personal Record* may be considered more usefully as an extension of Conrad’s novel writing; not as a novel itself, of course, but as an artful examination of a set of personal experiences which correspond to experiences portrayed in the novels. [...] His autobiography [...] is an elaborate, public, literary performance” (*Conrad’s Personal Record* 291). Both these notions – that of the biographical book as a supplement to his fictional works and of biography as a public performance – seem to be inseparable in the context of the time during which the *Record* and *Under Western Eyes* were composed.

Conrad had begun writing *Razumov* as a short story with a definite narrative arc that involved all of the same characters as the final version does, yet was much less complex or lengthy. He could not seem to extricate himself from the issues with which the book was concerned once he had begun. This resulted in his inability to deliver copy to J.B. Pinker while his preoccupation with European issues – as opposed to the maritime and English love story he was in the middle of writing when he began “*Razumov*,” which was the original story that grew into the novel, *Under Western Eyes* – as embodied within what was to become his Russian novel took over. It would seem that his preoccupation with one type of European characters had led to an examination of the self. In this process, he may have been forced by the grueling challenge the novel’s content

represented to him to also bolster his own personal geography as a novelist and his conception of himself as a persona (private, yet public).

Perhaps it is due to the structure of *A Personal Record* and the choices Conrad makes in selecting the material for inclusion that allows it to be considered a companion volume to *Under Western Eyes*. According to Kertzer the volume “provides the clearest example of one of Conrad’s major themes: the effort of an individual to establish a moral pattern in life” (*Conrad’s Personal Record* 291). Much has been written about the struggle of Razumov in *Under Western Eyes* to find a moral stance in his unmoored life. It is no wonder that the reasons for the inclusion of *A Personal Record* as supplementary to the fiction being written contemporaneously to it range across the characters portrayed within it and pertain to Conrad himself. Kertzer’s conclusion may be too enthusiastic in its pronouncement of *A Personal Record* as having “clarity, an eloquence, and a formal beauty which turn Conrad’s life into a moral romance” (*Conrad’s Personal Record* 301). Yet, the foundations for this pronouncement are in what Conrad had come to term a unity of subject and purpose within the seven reminiscences. In fact, the sections do meander across many subjects only to return to a “main story line,” that of the conception and writing of *Almayer’s Folly*, Conrad’s first novel, and thus to his affinity for the sea and things English.

A Personal Record cannot be considered only a supplementary work, however. Its outright biographical intent and structure cannot warrant such a reduction in literary status or in its importance to the larger body of Conrad’s work. Its artistic merit is addressed by critics in general, some of whom find it to be of equal stature to books such

as *Lord Jim* and *A Heart of Darkness*. While the criticism ranges across a wide variety of the subjects contained in *A Personal Record*, it seems difficult to parse into distinct and identifiable parts those deserving the greatest attention. It certainly is possible to focus on Conrad's reported need to address the heroic figure through repeated motifs of Don Quixote juxtaposed with his uncle, Nicholas B., and again with Napoleon, as Pamela Demory had in her 1997 article *Ambivalence in Joseph Conrad's "A Personal Record": The Anti-Autobiographical Autobiography*. The use of the heroic did not completely detract from the underlying issues with *A Personal Record*, however, and had been used to illustrate Demory's assertion that it "serves as a touchstone [...] mirroring the conflict that operates in all [Conrad's] work between the desire for some absolute reference point, and the recognition that such certainty is impossible" (64). This impossibility is outlined here in the manner through which Conrad posits these heroic figures and then proceeds to undermine their heroism, again bringing them down to an ordinary human level that is anything but heroic. Through this method, Conrad shows his readership that human, no matter the public stature, remains only human, fallible and fragile. The ambivalence of life in general, its fleeting success and inevitable demise are thus brought forth in Demory's study. The fact that "certainty is impossible" for Conrad points toward a sorely needed perspective in reading *A Personal Record* (Demory 64).

Demory discusses Conrad's use of Don Quixote's repeated attempts to put forth a chivalrous effort of defeating the injustices of the world in his fealty to an ideal. But this ideal is imaginary. "[Don Quixote] rides forth, his head encircled by a halo – the patron saint of all lives spoiled or saved by the irresistible grace of imagination. But he was not a

good citizen” (*PR* 37). Thus the façade of the chivalrous knight is marred by fact. His imagination had gotten the better of him. He had come to live in the fantasy of his romances, for which he had sold his land holdings and with which he had glutted his mind until he saw a double reality. Yet, even in this madness, he was ingenious and logically went about converting a washbasin into a helmet and chose the object of his fealty from within what he knew to be available. The difference between Quixote’s mad imagination and actual insanity may be paper thin, but so is the difference between Conrad’s use of the figure for his own ends and his pronouncement that Quixote “was not a good citizen” (*PR* 37). To be a good citizen, one cannot have been spoiled by fancy and cannot ride off, knowing that what glitters is not gold, but wanting to believe it is. One cannot be a good Pole while dreaming of adventure that does not include Poland. Or, for that matter, one cannot be “a little fat fellow in a three-cornered hat” and expect to take on Mother Russia and win, regardless of whether he is joined by the Poles in his fight (*PR* 132).

Conrad does compare his uncle, Nicholas B., with the heroic figures, drawing a decisive historical lineage. “... there are, I believe, only three warriors publicly known to have been wounded in the heel – Achilles and Napoleon – demigods indeed” and yet there is no mention of Don Quixote here (*PR* 48-49). It is Nicholas B., the reasonable, Polish officer who survived by eating a Lithuanian dog and had been put out to pasture by the resistance movement, while taking himself out of the game as well. He was prudent and a pretty good citizen, unlike Don Quixote. That association was reserved for Conrad himself. No great hero, but also not really a good citizen, he struck out like Don

Quixote, struck out to become an English sailor, despite of what he had been told by his uncle Bobrowski or anyone else. Like Don Quixote, he fashioned the adventure into a purposeful movement, not a flight from his reality, but a natural state of things.

Through the comparison of heroes and, what one might wish to term, chivalrous fools, Conrad manages to downplay the heroic statures of Napoleon and Nicholas B. One of them becomes an old and helpless country squire put out to pasture, while the other “a little fat fellow ... looking something like a priest” is banished from heroism publicly (*PR* 132). Through the failed invasion of Russia, Napoleon proved he was not fit to lead, simply on the basis of ego. It may then be said that Don Quixote, despite his sometimes feigned delusionary state was the greater of these heroes, much like Nicholas B., retiring to La Mancha only to finish his days, and that is the one with whom Conrad wishes to be identified. The heroic must have its shortfalls, though Achilles’ only shortfall is his rage and the one vulnerable spot on his heel. But, then again, Achilles was half God and so his humanity was demonstrated by the one vulnerable spot: his heel.

There is a mortal flaw in the physiological and psychological makeup of all of humanity. Yet, Conrad wishes to gloss over his own, while making it clear that he certainly possess such a flaw. The difference between him and the heroes of actual war, however, is that his imagination may be a bit more like Don Quixote’s than Napoleon’s. His own folly is not material but rather anachronistically romantic. He may not be the knight of La Mancha, but has ridden forth on a quest. His humanity is not in question, yet it is a purposeful type of humanity in the manner that it is presented in *A Personal Record*. He wishes to be like the “men who do not believe in wasting many words on the

mere amenities of life” (*PR* 39). In this last aim, he seems successful. It is in his efforts to be a purposeful Englishman that the question of success remains at issue. Yet, only his personal life is the subject of questioning once one reads the reminiscences in *A Personal Record*; the persona presented within this volume displays its drive and intent to be an Englishman, on the page if not in life.

In order for Conrad to write an autobiographical series of reminiscences, he had to interrupt work on the novel *Under Western Eyes*. It was this novel of which he later wrote: “I had never been called before to a greater effort of detachment – detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal memories” (*UWE* 281). Since the task of detaching all possible prejudices and memories was necessary in writing the novel, Conrad may have taken the opportunity of writing biography as an outlet for his psychological needs that had been suspended in his ‘Russian’ novel. Thus the *Record* became a supplementary work indeed; it served to release some of the tension of having to take himself out of the writing process of a novel which aroused in him strong feelings that had to be carefully edited out of that work. In writing biographical material, his feelings and memories, prejudices and psychological needs could be appeased to a greater degree. He did not have to suspend himself nor take himself out of it. Yet, simply because he could give free reign to the part of himself that was under strict control within the novel did not mean that he handed over the reins to a rogue biographer. As supplementary as the work may be, in Jean M. Szczypien’s view “[i]t, too, is a work of art.” Szczypien understands Conrad’s effort, stating that “in his writings the Anglo-Polish

author transcended bitter temporal tragedy by transfiguring dreadful facts into the perfection and performance of art.” Again, we are brought back to Conrad’s own remark regarding the unity of the subject within the volume as it stood at seven installments. Szczypien also addresses the predicament of the moment in which Conrad had found himself. “... writing his autobiography also enabled Conrad to attain a peace within himself regarding Poland” (*Joseph Conrad’s A Personal Record: Composition, Intention, Design: Polonism* 3-4). Though the practice of writing biography, its use as an outlet for his psychological needs of the moment, may have helped Conrad, it seems doubtful that he attained peace on a longer term basis through the exercise. One needs only to look forward to January 1911 and his row with Pinker for evidence of any peace being precarious at best.

A similar perspective to the attainment of relief has been posited regarding Conrad’s writing of *The Secret Sharer*. In the case of the fictional work, the notion is based on the essential similarities between the central conflicts of the *Sharer* and *Under Western Eyes*. In the case of *A Personal Record*, the similarities are difficult to ascertain, since it is not a unity of progression and plotting, but rather of subject inclusion and exclusion that warrants our attention. An important point made by Szczypien lies not within the explication, but rather in the use of the term Anglo-Polish in reference to Conrad. The hyphenated label meant, on a rudimentary level, to designate a person’s background carries a greater weight in Conrad’s case (as it would applied to many another assimilated exiles). Though such hyphenation is common to the early twenty-first century vocabulary, during Conrad’s time it was a rare occurrence, if present at all.

Conrad was quite simply a British subject of Polish birth to some, while to others he was plainly a Pole. The facts of his persistent foreignness in habit, manner, and speech have been pointed out by Richard Curle, among others. These outward manifestations of his Polishness (whether disclaimed by Conrad himself in later life is beside the point) could not cause him otherwise than to be noticed for the extraordinary personage that he was. Whether the notices were positive or the obverse had certain effects on him, but all such notices only served to reinforce the hyphenated self without a cogent label.

Conrad's self-designated *homo-duplex* could not help but be aware of the distinction between himself and the society in which he lived. The cultural geography of his physical location did not correspond closely to his personal geography. Of course, there is a degree of alienation involved in such blunt awareness, therefore the subject, Conrad, must have developed coping mechanisms if he was to continue functioning within proper behavioral norms. Let us recall that Jessie Conrad had called her deceased husband a man of a different *race*. The moment of such inscription does not truly matter since it is indicative of an attitude that either existed openly or smoldered beneath the surface of the household. The fact that we find no definite record of a row or explosion between the husband and wife cannot be used as evidence that such events did not occur. In short, even in his private life did Conrad experience himself as a duality of persons, a *homo-duplex*, an Anglo-Pole without the benefit of an easy, unifying label.

Citing Zdislaw Najder from the introduction to *The Mirror of the Sea* and *A Personal Record*, Lynda Prescott points to Conrad having to make choices among the avenues by which to approach his biography. Many of the stories presented in these

volumes “derive not from Conrad’s own memories and experiences but from the memoirs of his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski,” she states (*Autobiography as Evasion* 180). And although there seems to be evidence that some of the passages in the *Record* have been lifted word for word from Bobrowski’s memoir, we cannot be certain that Conrad himself did not possess these memories and experiences. Perhaps he had found it easier to tie his recollections to Bobrowski’s accounts of them, thus incorporating another part of his past into the biographical material. Perhaps this act of translation had allowed him partly to pay homage to his uncle in the process of accounting for his own life. Prescott does, however, seem to understand the difficulty Conrad must have experienced in choosing his material. “Part of the problem,” she states, “seems to have been that his family background actually presented him with a number of possible identities, and thus would not yield a unified meaning” (*Autobiography as Evasion* 180). The possibilities must have seemed endless. Conrad was forced to choose, if he were to write at all, among the many selves and their sources. In including Bobrowski’s material, he must have chosen to adopt an ancestral voice of reason and prudence. It was that voice that had helped to shape his life and attempted to guide him through his adolescence and early adulthood. His uncle was a *de facto* surrogate parent and by the inclusion of that parental voice, Conrad made a choice among the possible personas with which to present the public.

Of course, a steady voice and personality such as his uncle’s also contributed a level of comfort to Conrad himself. In translating and copying the material of the memoir, he may have incorporated it into his private as well as public persona and may have derived a greater sense of personal unity from the result. Through the act of

translation, Conrad also came to ‘own’ the language of Bobrowski’s writing. Polish and English are quite distinct as systems of communication are concerned. One is a gendered and impacted tongue, while modern English has shed such linguistic conventions over the intervening nine centuries since West Anglo-Saxon had been used in the Isles. Therefore, if and when Conrad set out to use Bobrowski’s stories outright, he did not simply copy over the material, but had to adapt that material to a new linguistic pattern and cultural context. In the process, as every translator can attest, he had reshaped the material in accordance with his own socio-linguistic, and in his case also artistic, sensibilities. The material had, in effect, become his through this process. The practice must also have given him a chance to internalize the stories in his own, albeit English, words, thus further facilitating a form of assimilation. His uncle now spoke through him and in a language that he had not used in their private communication. Such incorporation must also have brought Conrad a sense of calm in being able to bring yet another piece of his familial self into his English persona. Through this process of assimilation by translation, Conrad had not only strengthened his biographical piece, but must also have bolstered his sense of belonging within the British social geography.

No matter the charge of plagiarism leveled at Conrad, the resulting text as it is presented in *A Personal Record* comes to carry more than a dual cultural inscription. It also becomes a personal cultural space, a translation of one culture for an other, while also being shaped by the linguistic and artistic preferences of the translator, in whom a multi-cultural space necessarily exists and which space thus takes part in the re-creation of the Bobrowski material.

It may be enough to state that Conrad did not borrow outright. The case of the borrowed stories, however, does extend beyond their mere translation and Conrad's internalization of his source's voice and material. In his retelling of them, Conrad uses quotation marks for a good portion and introduces the material as having come directly from his uncle. The occasion for the feigned conversation is Conrad's visit to the Ukraine. The writing table used by Conrad's mother is the impetus for Bobrowski to begin spinning his yarn, which Conrad proceeds to report as a monologue. The quotation marks indicate a speaker delivering the story to Conrad, who then reports that story to the reader as if it were being told without the intermediary of the narrator or through a language barrier. When the stylized Bobrowski ends his tale "[h]e [gets] up brusquely, sigh[es]" makes a practical remark and his footsteps are listened to by the writer (*PR* 30-31). From this point onward, the mode of presenting the story does not seem to change drastically, but it is Conrad the writer who is speaking, judging by all stylistic indication. There is, again, some question as to whose version of the Nicholas B. story is being presented. Yet it seems clear that the speaker is no longer the uncle. Rather, the speaker is the narrator himself, having internalized the uncle's voice and transitioned through the sections of reported speech into a mode of direct address.

Since the stories the uncle delivers to the narrator, who then quotes him at length with what seems perfect recollection are not fiction, we cannot ignore the linguistic issue presented here. The text we are seeing on the page is meant to represent a conversation codified in a written form. Yet it also is translated by one of its participants, thus doubly translated: first from spoken to written form and again from one type of linguistic code to

another. Conrad thus raises the issue of what is and is not language, while also pointing to the personal blending with the public on a level of privilege. His biographical material may reveal to the reader something of Conrad the writer as that persona wishes to be seen. Through a conversation that may or may not have taken place – and did not take place in the language of its reported presentation – we are brought into his personal history (lived and otherwise) and must accept the event of the conversation as having taken place. If we allow that reading his uncle's memoir may have been much like a conversation – Conrad may have talked back aloud to his deceased relative now speaking to him through the pages – and that the reporting of that conversation had been run through the filter of Conrad's multi-cultural psyche, we have no choice but to allow the writer to put whatever markers he wishes to add to this report.

We must also further consider the translation mechanism, Conrad's coming to *own* the conversation he reports as having taken place, because, as has been pointed out, he did not simply lift the text on an even sum ratio. Zdislaw Najder addressed the issue of Bobrowski's memoirs at some considerable length: "Conrad developed and adjusted Bobrowski's text, making his anecdotes more pointed and adding lyrical or ironic comments" he writes (*Conrad in Perspective* 64). Najder's assertion is based in his comparison of the two texts. Despite what seems to be an imperfect task of comparing Conrad's translation and adaptation with Najder's own translation of Bobrowski's text, the differences between them are striking on a fundamental level at times. Bobrowski's style comes through as stylistically rather basic, though thorough in delivering whatever

he has set out to deliver, while Conrad's is a graceful version of the same information. At times, the information itself is a casualty as is apparent in the following:

Conrad:

She made light of the cough which came on next day, but shortly afterwards inflammation of the lungs set in, and in three weeks she was no more! (*PR* 30)

Bobrowski:

... as a result she caught a slight cold and began to cough, but as her health was on the whole quite good, no one paid any special attention. However ... her condition suddenly deteriorated. She developed a galloping consumption and died within six weeks.
(*Conrad in Perspective* 60)

Thus, while Bobrowski seems to consider a case of consumption to be “galloping” if it takes six weeks to kill his sister, Conrad seems to see a greater urgency in the word used by his uncle and foreshortens the time span for effect. Najder concludes his comparative examination of the two texts in the following manner:

Generally, the ‘Polish’ parts of *A Personal Record* offer an excellent example of Conrad's writing method: to ground the story even in the smallest detail on documentary or remembered factual material – and to weave the tale freely, treating this material in the same fashion as he treats elements garnered from other times and places and his own imagination.
(*Conrad in Perspective* 64)

It is the method of weaving the tale, of storytelling, that matters the most here. There is intent coupled with factual material, memory, and whatever the subconscious and conscious directing forces within Conrad's *homo-duplex* dictate. His Polish self is translated by his English counterpart. The two bring in the uncle, who becomes

incorporated into the narrative of the writer's life with as much intentionality as the writer's persona is crafted. Nothing of the writer's life presented by the *Record* is present without intent as simple fact or triviality. Najder's conclusion rightfully extends itself across all of Conrad's texts. None of these, save perhaps his letters, are uncontrolled, though one in particular does beg the question at times.

It is essential to recall Conrad's assertion that "a novelist lives in his work" (*PR* xv). Prescott correctly concludes that "[h]is shifting intentions for this autobiographical work and its carefully cultivated evasions reveal tensions and anxieties both about his public persona and about his personal sense of identity that ran very deep indeed" (*Autobiography as Evasion* 188). The matter of Conrad's cultivating evasions in his work does not seem to be quite as obvious or necessarily true from a Polish cultural perspective. Szczypien points us in a different direction. He asserts that "Conrad does employ a surreptitious method in discussing the deeply felt and deeply meditated aspects of his life." Yet he also states that "the scenes and images function metaphorically. But, if we do not read them for what they evoke, we shall respond to this book as many readers have, by lamenting the paucity of information in it" (*Joseph Conrad's "A Personal Record": Composition, Intention, Design: Polonism* 15). He then points the reader to an examination of the work from a somewhat cryptic and culturally very foreign (to an English reader) perspective. He traces the origins of the *Record's* coded, heteroglossic content to its Polish roots.

As with most critics, Szczypien also points to Conrad's struggle with the charge of desertion of Poland in her time of need. The self-justification and debunking of this charge seem to be one of the major goals of the material Conrad presents. Within the terms laid out by Szczypien, however, the text is rich in Polish literary allusions and motifs that are inaccessible to the average English critic who has not examined the literature of Poland. It is through his interpretation that one can recognize Conrad's aims in being understood on several levels by more than one target audience. The reminiscences are fashioned to be read in a unified manner by the English speaking audiences, while their depth increases greatly for an audience steeped in Polish culture. Even so, Conrad's inscription of Polish cultural motifs and outright reconfiguration of his uncle's memoir bridge the channel between the cultures of the Center and the West, making possible the hybridization of both for the benefit of an understanding by reading audiences on both sides. Regarding self-disclosure and self-defense, Conrad seems to achieve a balance within the biographical writing. Still, many have decried the paucity of direct facts in his writing precisely because Conrad is an artist, a story teller, and tells a story, which serves to veil much of the data contained in this volume, while fashioning the surface level of the persona he wishes the casual reader to perceive.

Following the publication of *Chance* and Conrad's newfound commercial success, his energies had turned to Poland. With the approach of the Great War and in its aftermath, he took an overt interest in the fate of his native land. The great geo-political shift within the mapping of European spheres of influence, combined with his

commercial success, had allowed for a larger audience in his efforts at familiarizing his English readers with the problems Poland faced – and that there actually was a country named Poland, which had problems of self-determination and cultural quashing from other quarters. Yet, during his writing of *A Personal Record* the platform from which he later addressed his readership was not available to him quite so readily. As a technique through which to address these very same issues, Conrad wrote *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*.

In his *The Invention of the West*, Christopher GoGwilt argues that Conrad had used the two volumes in order to refashion the map of Europe and argue the personal issue of being lumped into the mass of Eastern cultures under Russian domination. The label of “Slav” that had been applied to him by his friend and mentor Edward Garnett in an 1898 review and repeatedly echoed thereafter had seemed to ally Conrad’s Polish identity too closely with – and in the Western mind of an English audience probably indistinguishably from – the Russian-led, pan-Slavist movement. In effect, the Polish was indistinguishable from the Russian. GoGwilt argues that “Conrad’s decision to retile his own autobiographical fragment *A Personal Record* suggests a deliberate doubling of Russian novel and Polish reminiscences ... that might be explained in terms of Conrad’s desire to differentiate the political predicament of Razumov’s confessions from his own; to disconnect himself from the predicament of Russian political identification posed by Razumov’s “writing up of his record”” (GoGwilt 134). Therefore, Conrad is not only attempting to make the distinction between himself as a Pole from the Ukrainian or Russian cultural sphere; he must also somehow undo the damage that *Under Western*

Eyes had done to his public image, conflating the writer and narrator's predicaments in that novel with his person in actual life. His personal record is first and foremost a record that does not include a Russian Slavonic character and he must attempt to erase any such notion from the public's consciousness.¹⁶

Perhaps because his coding of the text within *A Personal Record* had been as successful as Szczypien notes, the results were that even the critics could not ascertain the intricacy of the material and thus were left wanting more factual material. Since the Western reading of that volume could not penetrate far enough below the surface of the text, Conrad seems to have encoded another layer within this text by supplying an Author's Note to the 1919 edition of the work. In that note, we find the often cited passage regarding ethnic (racial) distinctions between Poland and Slavdom (Russia) in general.

Nothing is more foreign than what in the literary world is called Slavonism, to the Polish temperament with its tradition of self-government, its chivalrous view of moral restraints and an exaggerated respect for individual rights: not to mention the important fact that the whole Polish mentality, Western in complexion, had received its training from Italy and France and, historically, had always remained, even in religious matters, in sympathy with the most liberal currents of European thought. (*PR*, ix)

Through this explicit attempt at distinguishing the Polish culture from that of Poland's colonizer Conrad must have hoped to put the issue of Slavonism as pertaining to himself and his homeland to rest. He did not succeed in doing so, as is evidenced by the

¹⁶ Perhaps it is for this reason that so much energy and space is spent on the Nicolas B. segment, in which the uncle eats dog and fights Russia on behalf of Napoleon's quest, but also in order to attain self-determination, such as it may be, for Poland.

continuing discussion of the subject throughout the intervening years. GoGwilt, writing well over seventy years after the publication of Conrad's corrective attempt, finds it necessary to point out Conrad's intent in the following manner. "What twins *A Personal Record* and *Under Western Eyes* ... is the attempt to correct the mistake of political genealogy encoded in the stereotype of the Slav" (GoGwilt 134). And though the Slav stereotype is the focus – the twinning of creative efforts seems to have its aim in making the distinction between East and West – we are left with the conundrum of how geography influences culture. GoGwilt's attempt to trace the redrawing of the map of Europe focuses on the making of a West within these two works. In the process, the issues of tribal/ethnic/racial/cultural differentiation must also be addressed as they are by Conrad's two works. Yet, the issue of geography remains. We may be given a New West through Conrad's efforts as interpreted by GoGwilt, while we are not granted a New East, nor a center. The map seems to be lacking an anchor and it is possible to argue that it was such an anchor Conrad had sought to delineate through his disclaimer of a common Slavic heritage.

Just as in the contemporary geographic terminology, we tend to forget about the cultures that occupy the space between an East and a West or a North and a South, it seems that this is not a new phenomenon. GoGwilt outlines the means through which Conrad seems to have helped create the notion of a West as we are aware of it in the present time. Yet, this act of definition among cultural spheres also seems to leave out some of the most important and fertile cross-pollination zones, namely those caught between the major blocks of cultural influence. And still, even such concepts as the

Anglo – Norman culture are not hegemonic and can be divided into smaller groupings. Preceding this particular formation of a Western Culture had been an Anglo-Saxon England, recently decolonized, as Conrad points out at the beginning of *A Heart of Darkness*, by the Roman Empire. There is perhaps no better measure of the fragmentary nature that is passed over and ignored by scholars in our time than the emergence of Post-Colonial Studies which grant special status among the colonized peoples of the world only to one European group, the Irish. Other linguistic and national groups are attributed to either a Western or an Eastern cultural group with little effort at discernment of what these cultures may actually contain. As David C. Moore had argued in a 2001 article on the subject of the dissolution of the Soviet block and the cultural and economic implications left in its wake, all countries once contained within the Soviet political and economic sphere fit the criteria of post-colonial nations in every way, but for one. Most of them are European nations.

The issue of colonization within Europe is not a new phenomenon, as is also evidenced by any cursory glance at the continent's historical shifts in influence. Without taking into account the Greco-Roman period, and beginning with Anglo-Saxon England, it is evident that the Norman Conquest of the Isles accomplished much the same thing as the partition of Poland had initially. In the case of the latter, however, the culture may have been heavily influenced by its would-be colonizers, yet had managed to resist and later reemerge from under the various forms of colonizing rule, perhaps stronger than it had been. It had not hybridized to such a high degree as had the English, perhaps because of its geographic constraints being more accessible, therefore the culture having to be

more resilient to cooptation by the colonizing powers or because the colonizers were many and differed in their approaches, thus making a unified effort at absorption and hybridization more difficult. Regardless of the reasons, Poland reemerged after the First World War and again after the Second, while after its most recent colonizer, the Soviet Union had managed to shift the nation's borders westward into what had once been Prussia, thus making Conrad's assertion of his homeland's "complexion" a near geographic actuality.

Regarding the matter of certain geographic areas as zones of cultural crosspollination and hybridization of greater frequency – not of greater importance; that sort of arrogance properly belongs to the colonizers who elevate their cultural forms far above those of the "primitives" whom they wish to dominate for profit and national strategic interests – we must account for Conrad's sentiment regarding Poland. The narrow band of countries which can be said to make up Central Europe does not include many tribal or national languages. Were we to discount the recent geopolitical terminology of East and West, we would be left with few names of those countries in the center, regardless of their past status as colonizers or colonized. These include Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and, to a lesser degree, Slovakia. The absence of Germany in this grouping as well as within the grouping of a New West is conspicuous and seems to defy logic in the same way that the inclusion of Austria does. The exclusion of Germany from a Central Europe may be historical through the Saxon affiliation with England, thus leading to the German tribes being neither Central, nor entirely western, due to their Diaspora throughout most of the European continent. Yet, the inclusion of

Austria, a country also populated by and large by Germanic tribes is also based on historical reasons, namely of Hapsburg Austrian dominance of the center of the continent that lasted well over three hundred years. Austria, just like Russia, had colonized a large portion of its neighbors through marriage or conquest, thus securing its geographic location. Though it is commonly lumped in with the Western powers, along with Germany, there seems to be a great deal of unease in such grouping. In short, both Germany and German speaking Austria are marginalized Western cultures. They are not quite fish nor fowl, yet are recognized as important in constituting a Western European culture, if only because of the frequent military struggles between the Anglo-French and Germanic spheres of influence.

When we speak of the other members of a Central Europe, namely those of Slavic descent, we must keep in mind the basic cultural influences that their geographic location has provided for them by default. These Western Slavic nations are documented as having existed more or less within their present borders ever since the 9th century A.D. Some had achieved these borders and cultural epicenters through the conquest of Celtic and Gothic tribes that had settled within what is now known as Bohemia and Moravia, as well as parts of Slovakia. Other Slavic tribes had ranged well into what is now known as Germany, northward along the Elbe. This outward migration of Slavic populations in German and Celt territories can be attributed to one of the anthropological riddles regarding Slavs in general. Where had they come from? Much speculation tends to point north of the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Yet, another possible point of origin is said to have been within Poland's eastern swamps. It is this origins myth that

allows the Western Slav tribes, especially the Poles, a claim to their Western cultural “complexion” by right of birth. Or, rather, in a world in which we are able to recognize the existence of a Central Europe, replete with its own hybrid cultures, the Poles and Czechs are allowed a claim to being exactly where they belong, not in an East, nor fully in the West, but right at home in the Center.

The notion of a center is, of course, relative to one’s point of view. Conrad himself calls Switzerland’s Geneva the Center of Europe, thus shifting cultural boundaries more than a thousand kilometers to the West, or, more importantly, toward England. The fact that Geneva is a French-speaking city not far from France proper may also point to Conrad’s affinity for the two cultures which are thoroughly Western in his view. Furthermore, this instance may also point to the idea that in order to be in the Western European Center, all of the Western cultural influences must be contained within it as they are embodied in the Swiss state with its distinct linguistic-cultural cantons. Italy is represented as the elder statesman of European history, Germany as the Eastern boundary, and France as the current cultural center, democratic and romantic, enlightened and oblivious to the threat coming to it from beyond Western Europe’s eastern boundary. This Western Center, however, cannot hold if we examine Conrad’s disavowal of a Russian Slavic heritage.

It would seem nearly impossible to perceive Conrad’s renunciation of a Russian Pan-Slavism as it relates to Poland as anything less than an effort to place Poland squarely in the spot that Switzerland seems to occupy for him not ten years earlier. Yet, as Eloise Kemp Hay points out “roughly until 1916 – he maintained a point of view that

was *neither* Eastern *nor* Western, but perfectly poised between the two” (Hay 24). Such a point of view would then deposit Conrad squarely in the geo-cultural space occupied by Poland: that of Central Europe. His position between the West and East, not a part of either, yet intimately familiar with both, also allows for his function as someone able to interpret the East for the benefit of the West, as is his stated intent in *Under Western Eyes*.

Despite such a vantage point, Conrad encounters another problem entirely in his attempt to interpret the interpreter. Thus the position of a cultural bridge that is Central Europe can aid its agent in interpreting and translating one culture for the benefit of another, yet it encounters difficulty in being recognized for what it actually is. The fixed ideas on the side of the British Isles of what it means to be from the East versus the West are in large part to blame for Conrad’s difficulty in being able to interpret himself in a manner that might be understood. His aim in disclaiming any ties to a Russian pan-Slavism may be twofold. On the one hand he does not wish to be identified personally with Russia and anything Russian, in spite of interpreting ‘things Russian’ for the benefit of his English-speaking audience. His reasons are cultural as well as based on a familial tradition. On the other hand, he does not wish for Poland and the Polish people in general to be associated with the type of Slavdom exemplified by Russia and its autocracy, since, according to Conrad, Polish culture owes nothing to Russia historically, nor does it possess the same roots. Its origins are self-contained and only over time have been influenced by Russian and Germanic invasions. His invocation of France and Italy, however, signals a desire and fealty toward a pan-European culture as it had been

embodied by *Pax Romana*¹⁷, and later taken in hand by the French. Thus, Conrad's West includes Poland through cultural and historical connections, some of which have been posited above.

Adding to the complexity of the already intricate situation, Conrad's perceived intent to be viewed as someone whose desire to attain a level of Englishness despite his birth can also be discerned within *A Personal Record*. The reminiscences may begin with a focus on the writing of books, then become more specific to *Almayer's Folly* and the close of Conrad's seagoing career aboard a French vessel that sails nowhere, yet the final installment brings us to the beginning of his sailing days in France and to his first encounter with an English ship.¹⁸

[...] and it was then that, for the very first time in my life, I heard myself addressed in English – the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions – of my very dreams! (*PR* 136)

The English voice that addresses him from aboard the *James Westoll* is reportedly the first representation of the language to speak directly to him. Perhaps this is true in light of the engineers he had encountered during his Swiss holiday being properly reserved and not speaking to those outside of their own group. It is convenient for the unity of the

¹⁷ For a closer examination of the resurrection of the (Holy) Roman Empire, see Dvornik, Francis. "The First Wave of the Drang Nach Osten." *Cambridge Historical Journal* 7.3 (1943): 129-45.

¹⁸ It may be rather significant that the French ship does not sail. The colonizing effort is coming to a halt and the heyday of the French culture as a world power may be disappearing along with it. The encounter with the English ship takes on a greater significance in this light: the English have become the dominant Western culture, replacing the French.

reminiscences to have his first personal contact with the language come from a ship. The scene does lend the overall narrative a unified thematic feel. It brings the reader back to Conrad's beginnings as a sailor. It is the beginning and not the end. The writer has not yet written a line of English – a probable fact in which even a skeptical critic can place some faith – and is yet to experience much of his life. There also is the promise of the reader experiencing those events along with the writer, though he had already set them down as impressions and characters within several volumes, including *Almayer's Folly*, which is a major character in its own right throughout the volume currently under examination. But it is the taste of promise, of what is to come and the reader's ability to follow those events configured in a storyteller's voice, one that seems to be his own and very much "one of us" in its desire and tone. It is a promise to remain with the reader and to divulge more than has been told about a life that is intentional in its Englishness and no longer hides behind the likes of Marlow or a Teacher of Languages.

The creation of an Englishness within these reminiscences can be as hybridized with the Polish aspect of the writer's life as it is within *A Personal Record* especially because the writer intends to tell his audience what kind of persona he wished to adopt. The one portrayed may be complex and difficult to discern at every twist and turn, but it *intends* to belong. It swears allegiance to its English homeland and audience. It is patriotic when others may not be. And it retains its affinity for its foreign cultural background without seeming to propose any changes to the English. It is the perfect subject and the ideal peer. There can be no doubt that Conrad's fashioning of this

narrator's voice, so close to the vest, yet so stylized, must have functioned for him therapeutically while he wrote *Under Western Eyes*, the *Record's* sister volume.

Conrad's efforts at Englishness may not have needed the type of reinforcement he seems to have thought necessary in his 1919 "Author's Note". Not that "[t]he truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born" could necessarily hurt his case or the persona he had managed to create within the earlier installments (*PR* vii). Rather, the fact that he felt the need, regardless of its having been instigated by comments from without, to reinforce his case makes the 'truth' harder to comprehend. Instead of clarifying an intentional persona his comments obscure and complicate the matter:

English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption – well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character. ... One knew very well that this was for ever. (*PR* vii – viii)

If English was never a choice for Conrad, as his statement above indicates, what of all the efforts he had outlined within the reminiscences that propelled him toward the language, if only by the default of choosing to go to sea? The "idea of choice" may not have been manifest for the Conrad writing the "Author's Note", but it seems to be present in the narrative of his life. His apparent conversion to English is not a willed and fated story that the reader wishes to follow well beyond its abrupt, though logical and romantic, terminus any longer. Conrad becomes the plaything of the Fates. English absorbs him

rather than a mutual assimilation taking place. These notions are supplied within the above excerpt, yet seem to contradict the storyteller, not the confessor, of the writer's life. That storyteller is a strong and dignified figure who has just been overtly complicated by the author's statements. The Conrad who comes through during the writing of the "Author's Note" then, seems less confident and more in need of reassuring himself as well as his audience of his fealty to England. His position has been compromised in contrast to the Conrad narrator who had penned the biographical material contained in the volume which the note precedes. Perhaps this is due to the political changes that had taken place within Europe following the Great War. The one that seems to have exerted the greatest influence on Conrad is the reemergence of a free Polish state and all the issues which this fact exacerbates. Richard Curle felt it necessary to debunk any theories or rumors of Conrad's considering a return to his native Poland.

Eloise Camp Hay suggests that Conrad's identity was poised between the two sides of his heritage until the year 1916, that is, until at minimum two years prior to his writing of the "Author's Note". What had happened to Conrad's equilibrium of personality since 1916 until he sat to write the note? Poland had reappeared on the map of Europe and with it one of the certainties of his exile had crumbled. Such change may not seem major to a critic or reader who has not experienced history in an exile's shoes, but for Conrad this event must have been momentous, not only on a practical level, but also psychologically. It rendered certain ideas regarding the narrators of both *A Personal Record* and *Under Western Eyes* obsolete. He could return to his homeland without having to subjugate himself to Russian or Austrian rule if he did decide to remain there.

He no longer was an exile from an oppressed land, but a British subject of Polish extraction who remained in Britain because he simply did not return to Poland. With this knowledge must have returned the accusations of desertion that he had once confronted from within and without. In a sense, he possessed the ultimate freedom that he had lacked in years prior. He could return to Poland or he could remain in England. Richard Curle must have been aware of the dilemma within Conrad, which, of course, must have come from within as well as from without. Regardless of these influences, Conrad was forced to choose between Poland and another, once again. It must have been in light of this return to ground zero that he wrote the "Author's Note" with its vehement need for the English language. In other words, he did not want to choose any longer; he had chosen long ago¹⁹.

Though it seems that the readers of *A Personal Record* are not provided much factual information regarding Conrad's Polish roots and his life in general within the volume, it is not to the detriment of the material that is presented. In fact, as Jean M. Szczypien has argued, the writing is rich in contextual matter and provides much more information, albeit coded, to a Polish audience. For a British, or English-speaking, readership, the book provides a portrait that may not be overtly personal, but in one sense: it portrays the persona of the novelist striving for a community within the English-

¹⁹ The fact that Poland was reborn following the Great War can also be cited, with some certainty in my opinion, as a major contributing factor to Conrad's declining the offer of Knighthood. Such an honor would certainly have made him "one of us" or as English as English could be for any foreign born. He would have been a part of the club, an integral part of the English nobility, though still of Polish noble birth. How the two social ranks would have intermingled is of some concern. Still, to have forged an alliance between the Polish and English nobility in this manner must have been beyond his abilities since it would no longer be interpreted by his countrymen as an act of resistance to the colonizers, but rather one of complete and final desertion.

speaking world because the place from whence he came is ill suited for his temperament. Still, the culture from which he originates and the British culture both share many similarities in attitude toward the world.

The method of relating information within *A Personal Record* may not be linear, nor is it obvious at all times. Rather, as in his fiction, the author presents us with impressions of his life and of the stories that have influenced the persona he wishes us to see and to whom he would like us to feel sympathetic.

Conrad used his uncle's memoir as 'found' material, or as material with which he may have had experience and probably recalled from his Polish years, but of which he may have needed to bolster his recollection. In translating and stylizing that material, Conrad must have found a measure of peace in that he could now 'speak' in unison with his uncle's voice, thus bridging the linguistic boundary between his two distinct selves. Furthermore, through the stylistic handling of the Bobrowski material, Conrad called attention to what the function of language might be; what is left in the wake of thought and how thought and conversation differ, if they differ at all. These issues are present within *Under Western Eyes* as well, which forces the proposition that Conrad was very much concerned with ideas of self within the realm of language versus the pre-linguistic self. Linguistic conventions and the verbalization of thought play a major role in identity creation and, as Conrad had called himself a *homo-duplex*, the two worlds within which he operated openly in *A Personal Record* are thus unified under the guise of an English Writer's persona.

The resulting persona, the one whom the reader may wish to follow in future reminiscences or adventures, forms a hybrid, multicultural geography with an expressed desire to be English first and foremost. The sentiment is further carried through the writer's invocation of distinctly Western European heroic figures: Napoleon and Don Quixote. These icons of Western culture are used to supply the ideal against which the author measures his uncle Nicholas B. and that man's life, while also using Don Quixote alone as a measure of his author's personal quest. Though the overriding notion seems to indicate that the author is a version of Don Quixote, he is a version that may be idealistic and somewhat blinded by reading, yet is clear sighted and intentional at once. And while it is the author who seems to benefit the most from the comparison, Poland is posited in much the same sentiment: it is clear-sighted, yet doomed; it does not have a way out of its predicament because of its geography. And so it continues to resist its oppressors, namely Russian autocracy. Conrad, unlike his homeland, took the option of riding out of that country and acting in a chivalric manner, just as he imagined the English acted, therefore he wanted to be one of them.

To be "one of us" is, of course, the recurring theme in Conrad's works. In *A Personal Record*, there is no question as to whether the author does or does not belong. He is squarely British and Polish at the same time. He is a cosmopolitan settled in England. He is a seafarer and a nobleman. The facts are presented, yet only in their vaguest outlines, whereas the, most likely, fanciful version of the Lithuanian dog is presented in nearly minute detail. Perhaps it is this very incident that should alert Conrad's readers to the writer's predisposition to reportage of impressions versus their

embellishment. Stripping away the fine details of the stories may seem inviting in this light, but would most likely not be helpful in the long run. Conrad invested much of his memory in the creation of *A Personal Record* and, whatever else might be true, the layers presented therein should not be discarded if one wishes to see more of the persona he intended us to see.

Throughout the *Record*, we can discern the author's intention to be English at any cost. Whether the intent was to provide us with factual information no longer matters by the end of the seventh part, based upon the impressions that have been imparted. The 1919 "Author's Note" brings the discussion back on several points that Conrad seemed to have gracefully glossed over or solved on the level of the story within which they may have been couched.

Chapter 5: Appearances, Facts, and Intent: Conrad as “One of Us”

I.: Coding the Message

Those familiar with Polish history and literature may perceive Joseph Conrad's filial devotion to the cultural geography of his origin within *A Personal Record*. In his article on Conrad's Polonism, Jean M. Szczypien has exposed the rudiments in which the coding is grounded. While it is possible to point to Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeus* and other classics of Polish patriotic romanticism in Conrad's biographical volume, it is more difficult to unearth the groundwork upon which the coding of *Under Western Eyes* is built. Both volumes are rather personal in their content and contexts, and in what seems to be Conrad's intent to reveal certain facets of himself to the English public. It is, however, *Under Western Eyes*, the 'fictional' accounting of "something told me by a man whom I met in Geneva years ago ... and by the rubbishy character of stories about Russian revolutionists published in magazines" that seems to require delving into the covert details of Conrad's biography to retrieve the basis and details (*Notes by Joseph Conrad* 28). While some of these details may have to be left to the imagination, the

underpinning situations and coincidences seem to approximate Conrad's life situations closely enough to warrant the present hypothesis.

In his life and his experience, Conrad was forced to do as many an exile had done before and after him: he had hidden his identity, blended in with the crowds, and stood out only when reasonably certain of his position. Even then was he unpleasantly surprised at the tenuousness of his social status as evidenced by his encounter with J.B. Pinker over Conrad's linguistic prowess. This unceasing tenuousness and consistent need to blend in like a chameleon had predisposed him psychically to need to let his adoptive compatriots know that he indeed was one of them, yet not entirely like them, and that his position within their Western social geography was unique. In his essays "Autocracy and War", published in the July 1, 1905 issue of the *Fortnightly Review* and the July 1905 issue of *The North American Review*, "Poland Revisited" appearing as a serial during March and April of 1915 in the *Daily News Leader* (UK) and the *Boston Evening Transcript* (US), "A Note on the Polish Problem" written for and delivered to the Foreign Office on August 15, 1916, then republished in a private edition of 1919 and again in *Notes on Life and Letters* in 1920, and again in "The Crime of Partition" written in December 1918 and published in the *Fortnightly Review* in May 1919, then again, in revised form in *Notes on Life and Letters* in 1920, to mention the major essayistic efforts, he displayed his 'privileged' knowledge of the East as it related to the Center and West of Europe's socio-cultural geographies. In three of these works, he acted as a 'Cultural Bridge' on an impersonal basis. In "Poland Revisited" the narrative of his return trip to Poland took on a personal note and a theme of a trip backward through time, one that lent him a chance

to relive memories in their original surroundings. While the personal dimension of the essay seems to outweigh the political, the essay remains partially a record of historical events (the First World War) impacting everyday life, and thus encompasses a political dimension. Conrad's own socio-cultural geographies further underline the dilemmas faced by the Poles, whose feelings were tied closer to England rather than Russia or Austria, further accentuating the intersection of human and cultural with political geographies.

Within the earlier work of biography, *A Personal Record*, Conrad's aim seemed to be to point to the similarities between his 'homeland of birth' and his adoptive country, while also creating a likable, engaging, and purposeful persona for himself and placing that before his readers. Encoded in the biographical writing was a myriad of culturally specific material that the non-Polish readership was certain to leave unrecognized. This act, while subversive to the surface meaning of the writing, indicated his psychological condition of an exile whose feet were placed firmly within both his culture of origin and his adoptive culture. A more comprehensive and palatable term for this exilic condition was coined by Conrad himself: *homo-duplex*. This term not only contains the definition used in the preceding lines, but is flexible enough to contain all of those terms that have been used to describe Conrad throughout much of Conrad Studies.

This *homo-duplex* is displayed again in *Under Western Eyes* within its more rudimentary functions: as a guide for one cultural group through the political culture, actions, and cultural attitudes of another. It is in this novel that Conrad's narrator and proxy, Teacher of Languages, acts as a 'Cultural Bridge' on a more personal level, as the

analysis of the plot and its construction shows. Yet, it is not only on the level of plot and situations that the condition of *homo-duplex* is displayed. The Teacher of Languages himself is the subject of the story despite being its fictional translator, interpreter, and scribe. A fair comparison, in the sense of functional complexity presented by this narrator, has been made between the Teacher and Sidi Hamid Benengeli, Cervantes' scribe and translator of Don Quixote. His condition is characteristic of the exile in an adoptive land and points to Conrad's own existence within the confines of that city and country, while conducting his personal affairs there. It is within this context that we must consider Conrad's coding of the text on a personal and meta-biographical level. It is this condition that he is attempting to illuminate for his readers, albeit covertly. The secrecy with which the illumination is accomplished has led some of the most notable Conradian scholars to explore the levels and means of communication that are present within this novel. Frank Kermode has gone as far as calling the Teacher "the father of lies, a diabolical narrator" in his effort to decode this particular aspect of the narrative (Kermode 96). Therefore, while the condition presented by the narrator as his own may indeed be Conrad's, it also represents a layer of narrative which proves to confuse the Western reader, who is, supposedly, less skilled than the average Russian or Pole at recognizing and deciphering what George Orwell had later termed 'doublespeak.'

The task at hand, however, is complicated by cultural geographies, linguistic barriers and geographic-linguistic delimiters and crosspollination zones, as well as the final, maddening issue of a personal, provisional space or geography which is all of Conrad's creation and into which we, the readers, are allowed only glimpses from within

the text. Those glimpses are precious few within the pages of *Under Western Eyes*. Yet, they are glimpses, as ‘unwanted’ and as skillfully ‘evaded’ as they may be by the Teacher of Languages. Perhaps the reason for the near-secret coding of a provisional-personal geography the Teacher attempts to get away with is a result of his awareness that he is not, despite the manner of the telling, the subject of his narrative. The manner of coding may also be influenced by Conrad’s psychic development since his initial, overt effort at explaining the exile’s predicament in rather harsh terms. That is to say that his initial attempt at disclosing a provisional-personal geography had not garnered positive results and may have accomplished the opposite.

In his 1901 short story “Amy Foster” can be discerned Conrad’s attempt at communicating the alienation of the exile in a foreign land and it is also this story that is quite often interpreted as having been modeled on his own experiences in England. While it may be true with “Amy Foster” as well as with *Under Western Eyes* that Conrad had used aspects of his personal life as blueprints for certain situations and characters, the same can be said about much of his fiction. It is within these two fictional works as well as within *A Personal Record*, however, that the level of ‘personal’ differs from his maritime works. The predicaments and situations addressed by these works seem to lie outside of the easily classifiable context of his second *homo-duplex* condition, that of the sailor-writer, and explore the primary binary pair of Pole-Englishman, or, rather, Pole-other, displaying the underlying binary of belonging versus exile. Though Conrad’s experience of exile had by then been dealt him in triplicate, this could not have diminished its impact, nor the awkwardness of its repeated renewal. Whereas during his

exile accompanying his parents he had an implicit community with which he underwent the experience and during his self-imposed “leap” into exile still possessed a familial background which afforded a measure of certainty, the third, if one may count so few, stage of Conrad’s exile possessed none of these certainties. He was on his own in a foreign country and had to establish himself once again. Within the pages of “Amy Foster”, we can observe a possible outcome which did not materialize for him. Yet, it is a story of reverse othering, of a possible situation that he did not undergo to its fullest extent.

II. The Shock of Finally Landing: Amy Foster

By the time Conrad wrote “Amy Foster”, he had been married for five years and had a two-year old son, Borys. He had written *The Nigger of the Narcissus* the preface to which is often credited as being his artist’s manifesto. His status as an English novelist had become fairly certain with the publication of the aforementioned volume, as well as of *Lord Jim* and the serialization of *Heart of Darkness* in *Blackwood’s Magazine*. His *Tales of Unrest* was named book of the year by the *Academy*. The honor was accompanied by a monetary award. While writing “Amy Foster”, Conrad’s collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, *The Inheritors*, was published. In other words, Conrad’s literary output had momentum and garnered notice within literary circles. He seemed to be becoming established upon the English scene, a fact that should point away from, rather

than toward, writing a piece such as “Amy Foster”. And yet, perhaps exactly because of his newfound base within the English social realms and because of the establishment of a familial environment, there sprung a need to explore issues of personal duplicity, personal geography, and, most certainly, linguistic geographies as they were presented to him on a daily basis in his home and his professional life. The closer he came to becoming rooted in his adoptive culture, the greater his desire to explain the effects life as an exile had on him became.

The desire to be understood by those who surrounded him and, if all else failed, those who read his works, seems to be apparent within the story of Yanko Gooral’s demise. The basis of the story, though initially disputed by critics, seems to have been ascertained with clarity by Zdislaw Najder. “Conrad’s imagination was aroused by an anecdote related by Ford in *The Cinque Ports*, published in the autumn of 1900. Ford mentioned there a shipwrecked sailor from a German merchant ship who, washed ashore in Kent, unable to communicate in English and driven away by the local country people, finally found shelter in a pigsty” (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 273). Although Najder’s assertion seems extremely credible, his geographic placement of Yanko Gooral’s origin, and so ethnic origin, seems less convincing. That “Conrad reshaped the anecdote into a moving story about a young peasant” is doubtlessly an accurate assessment. But that this peasant was “from the Tatra Mountains” has its textual basis only within the introductory statement regarding Yanko (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 273). Conrad’s narrator, Doctor Kennedy, initially describes Yanko as “a castaway. A poor emigrant from Central Europe” (*Typhoon and Other Tales* 154). The description justifies Najder’s assumption of

Yanko's mountain home being in the Tatras range that runs through the present-day border between Poland and Slovakia. Yet, Doctor Kennedy returns to the issue of Yanko's origin by way of recounting a newspaper article. Here, Yanko is described as "a mountaineer of the eastern range of the Carpathians," a statement that contradicts his being from Central Europe (*Typhoon and Other Tales* 161). Examining a topographical map will reveal that the eastern ranges of the Carpathian mountains stretch well into present day Rumania. Limiting the range of Yanko's possible ethnicities, Kennedy recounts "the bogus 'Emigration Agencies' among the Sclavonian peasantry in the more remote provinces of Austria" (*Typhoon and Other Tales* 161). Therefore, Yanko Gooral – an anglicized version of a distinctly Slavic name, Janko Gural, meaning Johnny Mountaineer – is of a Slavic nationality or ethnicity and from an eastern part of the Carpathians. These facts seem to eliminate the possibility suggested by Najder, namely that Yanko is from the Tatra range, since these are the tallest of the Western span of the Carpathian chain. Further limiting Yanko's possible ethnicity is the fact of his being from an Austrian province. The mention of its remoteness also eliminates the Tatras, since they are reasonably close to Vienna, if not the closest, considering the size of the Austrian empire of that time. Since the empire was bordered in the East by Russia's hegemony, we are left to speculate only a little.

Though Hapsburg Austria of Conrad's time was a multicultural and widely divergent place, with an extremely paranoid and repressive legal and police apparatus in its cosmopolitan cities, its far eastern provinces and countryside in general were much more homogeneous. Therefore the task of identifying Yanko's ethnicity should be

possible from an ethnic distributions map. Were this assumption to hold true, we would be forced to conclude that Yanko was Ruthenian. Yet, the same statement that had led Najder to ascertain Yanko's place of origin as the Tatra Mountains complicates any assessment.

If Yanko is from Central Europe and from "the eastern ranges of the Carpathian mountains" then we must redefine our understanding of what constitutes 'Central Europe'. Traditionally speaking, Central Europe has been defined as the cluster of countries that form a barrier between the German and the Russian cultural zones. It includes the Western Slavic linguistic group; that is, the Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks. Included in the geographic definition are the three Slavic groups within their primary regions of habitation, as well as Austria, Prussia (Germany), and, in large portion, Hungary. While Austria is included in this assessment as a Central European country, prior to the Great War it controlled parts or all of the countries and ethnicities listed here, as well as parts of present day Ukraine and Rumania, Bosnia, Slovenia, Italy, and Croatia. Therefore, for the sake of exactitude, we must further delimit the boundaries of a 'Central Europe' as it stands geographically rather than politically. Within such a definition, the countries that remain are present day Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Germany (its Eastern provinces), and Hungary.

As useful as this determination may prove in its own measure, it is little help in determining Yanko's nationality unless we take into account the notion of cultural awareness that is native to Central Europeans. Those from the Central European region would view anyone from "the eastern ranges of the Carpathians" as being from the East

(*Typhoon and Other Tales* 161). That is, the Ruthenian would be viewed as belonging to a related culture, especially by central Europe's Slavic population, but also one that is grossly influenced by the Eastern or Russian culture and belongs to it, rather than to the culture of Central Europe. Ruthenians are often considered the long-lost cousins of those Central Europeans. We need only to recall Conrad's pronouncement that "the whole Polish mentality" is "Western in complexion" in order to understand the Central European preference to be associated with the political and cultural currents and institutions of a France or an England, rather than those of the Eastern Slavic tribes, namely of Russia (*PR* ix). And still Conrad's deliberately contradictory description of Yanko's origin leaves us no wiser as to his intent. In all likelihood, Conrad meant to mislead and confuse his readers and critics alike through this use of ethnic origin. Or, the duality is brought in to highlight the duality of the actual subject: the condition Conrad himself seemed to be experiencing in his English life.

Since Conrad was born in Berdyczow, Ukraine, not far from the eastern Carpathians and Ruthenia, it may be said that Yanko's and Conrad's personal geographies of origin are closely aligned. With the mention of Central Europe, we are transported to the Tatras, as Najder has speculated. Krakow is not far from the foothills of the Tatra Mountains and Conrad had spent some time in that range as a child. These facts also point to Conrad's intentional design of Yanko's origins being a manner of charting his own childhood geography. The parallels between author and character are thus expanded and also indicated as a viable, biographical interpretative route for critics to follow within the story.

Both author and fictional character came from the eastern provinces of what had been Poland. Both arrived in England unable to speak the language and be understood by the local population. Though Gooral was shipwrecked literally, Conrad must only have felt much the same after his unsuccessful stint aboard the *Mavis* from which he signed off at Lowestoft, reportedly forfeiting half of his deposit of 500 francs. As Najder reports “he departed for London; there, with lightning speed, he went through half his ready cash” which probably left him somewhat despondent (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* 55). Gooral married the first Englishwoman who showed him a bit of kindness and something to that effect can be said of Conrad’s marriage to Jessie George, including the quality of both women’s character within their distinctly divergent contexts. Conrad’s son, Borys, was born in the winter of 1898 and was still quite small at the time of Conrad’s creation of Gooral, who also had a son with an Englishwoman.

We can also compare an instance of grave illness that Conrad had experienced during his honeymoon and which is described by Jessie in her first memoir. While these are some of the obvious similarities, there are other, less noticeable traits that the men share, most notably, the alienation from the culture within which they find themselves. Even after two decades in the service of the British merchant marine, Conrad must have felt strongly enough the outsider to be driven to write this story despite every possible effort to fit within his new cultural geography. And it may be exactly because of his efforts to be understood and have his public gain an inkling of what an emigrant or assimilated exile might undergo within their cultural sphere that he endeavored to write

the piece. Jocelyn Baines seems to have understood Conrad's situation and the forces that were at work in his writing very well:

Apart from its considerable merit as a story "Amy Foster" is important in that it vividly and simply illustrates one of the main themes of Conrad's work, the essential isolation and loneliness of the individual. Moreover, the tale probably draws some of its horror and power from Conrad's own experience as a foreigner in a strange country, speaking scarcely a word of the language. It is easy to detect an autobiographical note in Conrad's description of Yanko Gooral 'feeling bitterly as he lay in his emigrant bunk his utter loneliness; for his was a highly sensitive nature' [...] (*Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* 267)

The comparison between Yanko's and Conrad's natures implicit in the passage, the fact that "essential isolation and loneliness of the individual" do figure prominently in Conrad's work, and "that a novelist lives in his work" all seem to point toward Conrad's attempt at communicating, via Gooral, both a personal and general truth (*PR* xv). His effort can be characterized as defining a new general geography of exile, as well as a personal one. In a sense, he acted as a translation machine or a "cultural bridge" between Poland, and its environs, and his English readership.

On the personal level, the story seems to have run deeper still. Though Baines points to the impetus for the story having been taken from Ford and fleshed out by Conrad's experience and imagination, he does not elaborate on what these might have been biographically speaking. He does mention that Jessie had written of the supposed prototype for Amy Foster's character being "for many years in the Conrads' service" (*Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* 267). Yet, Baines does not elaborate. It is curious that he should point to Jessie's accounts without mentioning her vehement denial of the

story's further relation to Conrad's life beyond that of the girl whom they had employed. Jessie was forceful, however, in her account of the story, perhaps leading Baines to conclude that opening up the case she had sought to shut was the wisest approach.

[...] "Amy Foster" [...] F.M.H. claims that the plot was his in "A personal Remembrance." The only foundation for this claim is that there is in Winchelsea churchyard a grave which bears on the head-stone no name, but recording the fact that the bodies of one or two foreign seamen are buried there, after being washed ashore. [...] The actual character, Amy Foster, was for many years in our service, and it was her animal-like capacity for sheer uncomplaining endurance that inspired Conrad. That and nothing else. (*Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him* 117-18)

Jessie seems to want to be the arbiter of all things related to the story of "Amy Foster", a quality and trait of her writing in the both of her memoirs. She adopts a superior attitude not only as a guardian of the 'correct' information which the critics might use for interpretation, but also toward Conrad himself. In this, her first memoir, the tone may seem mostly well intentioned, while in the latter book she further asserts her 'right' as the gatekeeper to the 'truths' of Conrad's life in England and in general. What might be ascertained from the above passage, however, is her guardedness against any biographical basis for the story. It seems as if she were afraid of being likened to an "Amy Foster" herself and so presents her readers with a scapegoat figure whom they had supposedly employed. This evasive attitude seems to point at self-awareness, given the events within that story and some rather real situations that must have taken place between herself and Conrad. If no record of any of these has been preserved beyond the pages of her memoirs – and these have their own intent – then let us consider proof of

one of the story's central tenets, that of linguistic geography as related to a male child, to be that neither Borys Conrad nor his brother John spoke Polish.

A further detail, the supposed basis of the story being suggested by Ford's earlier piece, also seems to be too vehemently denied by Jessie's account. It is likely, after all, that Conrad had drawn upon various sources of inspiration to create the events of this tale. Why then would Jessie insist that Ford had no input? After all, Ford's German sailor being treated as a wild animal and finding shelter in a pigsty does correspond to the initial part of the tale, while a grave marker in a local cemetery coincides with Yanko's ultimate fate. The events between and prior to these sources serve to connect and enrich the simple outline. And these as well have their roots.

Conrad's connection to and awareness of Polish national character and its literature has been discussed at length by the likes of Adam Guillon, among others. Wieslaw Krajka has stated that "Polishness is deeply ingrained in [Conrad's] character and texts, and therefore should be constantly re-examined" (*Conrad and Poland* 49). In her recent study of the links between Polish literature and Conrad's "Amy Foster", Anna Brzozowska-Krajka has done exactly that. She has traced the origins of the Gooral (mountaineer) people in the national folklore of Poland to the Romantic Movement which had enshrined it in a veil of innocence and purity and set them forth as an example of a true national character. The play *Karpaccy Gorale* by Jozsef Korzeniowski, she argues, serves to provide "an intertext, an authoritative text for 'Amy Foster'" (*Korzeniowski vs. Korzeniowski* 160). Citing Conrad's awareness of the writer and the play in general, she points to Yanko's character as having been modeled, in part, on the earlier work and to

Conrad's use of national folklore for the purposes of stylization of Yanko's character to a recognizable Slavic goral stereotype.

Conrad certainly had been aware of Korzeniowski and his work, as is evidenced by a letter to Edward Garnett in which Conrad discusses his lineage at some length. "Then in the thirties of the 19th century (or forties) there was a novelist of about say – Trollope's rank (but not so good in his way) named *Joseph Korzeniowski*. That is also my name but the family is different ..." (*Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895 – 1924* 165). The date of the letter as well as the content of the Korzeniowski play seem to suggest that this work had not a small influence in Conrad's creation of "Amy Foster." If indeed it lay dormant until the mention of a German sailor by Ford during their collaboration on *The Inheritors* its existence further undermines Jessie's effort to limit the scope of material from which the story was drawn. It is not a far leap to understand that Conrad had pulled together many sources for this tale once a solid vehicle for it presented itself. The details drawn from his own personal struggles, his thorough understanding and so depiction of the horrors Yanko underwent at the hands of the villagers but also, most importantly, at the hands of his wife, suggest that Jessie indeed had good reason to stem the biographical comparisons being made public by reviewers and critics.

In all fairness, Jessie was no Amy Foster; her intelligence certainly surpassed what Conrad had portrayed within the story. She understood the story well enough to know how it could be interpreted and had probably read the reviews as well. She knew the correlations were present and so attempted to staunch the bleeding before it worsened. Her fear of the Slavic husband and his 'eastern' language seems evident from the account

of Conrad's illness during their honeymoon. Her effort, however, only serves as proof of the validity of these correlatives. Conrad's inclusion of the personal as well as the general within the piece indicates his knowledge that his predicament was not so different from that of other exiles. His effort within the pages of "Amy Foster" seems to have been aimed at pointing out precisely what a difficult situation the exile and émigré can encounter. His initial audience, however, was composed of those among whom such exiles and émigrés might find themselves. Therefore "Amy Foster" seems to be an effort at cross-cultural communication. Once again, Conrad serves as a translating machine and a cultural bridge. The translation of the story into Polish must then have served as a type of warning to those who may wish to emigrate to America²⁰ or England. And again, Conrad here serves as a cultural bridge or go-between, though with discernibly lesser direct intent.

III.: Remembering to Forget: Conrad Soldiers On

"Amy Foster" was the precursor in subject matter and measure of interpretation of both *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*. Its reception by the critics usually included outright praise for the volume *Typhoon and Other Stories* in which it was

²⁰ An aspect of Yanko Gooral's name that seems to have been ignored is its correspondence to the word Yank. He is indeed on a ship bound for America and so is looking to become a Yank, though he remains a Yanko because the ship does not make it. The name may have been anglicized primarily for pronunciation purposes, but the ease with which it transforms into an English synonym for an American cannot be left ignored. Conrad could have, after all, chosen to call Gooral something other than this particular diminutive of Jan. Others were indeed available, such as Yanek or Honza.

published in book form. The fact that it was couched within this volume of ‘sea stories’ and itself derived necessary plot points without which the story would not have been possible from the sea seems to have tempered some of the criticism leveled in its direction. For the most part, “Amy Foster” was glossed over as a moving tale, but “here again, it is not so much the characters in the story who live and move as the great neighbouring sea that lives and moves within them” wrote a sympathetic critic in the *Daily Mail* (Sherry 146). Thus, the issues Conrad seems to have sought to address: reverse exploration, the alienation of foreigners within English society, or the impossibility of full assimilation to the English social hierarchy are all passed over in favor of focusing on the sea. It would seem that no matter how sympathetic the critic may have been, in his efforts to accept Conrad’s piece that pointed at English xenophobia he was forced to read past the page and the story painted there, and cast poor Yanko Gooral back into the ocean.

Such willful reading through or past the page is not to be begrudged too vehemently. At the very least, the reviewer had taken pains to discuss the plot and issues the story contained before moving onto his chosen subject of the sea. By actually supplying a reading, this reviewer had made the minimal, albeit surely uncomfortable, effort a writer might wish to see. Others were not so kind. Another unsigned review, this one from the pages of the *Glasgow Evening News*, dismisses “Amy Foster” and “To-Morrow” as “lack[ing] importance mainly by reason of their themes.” And though Conrad may not have endeavored, in the critic’s opinion, to use ‘proper themes’ for those two tales, he is also accused of “ignor[ing] some of the fundamental factors of human

life,” interestingly enough (Sherry 150). Thus, while Conrad certainly does not seem to have much of an eye or ear for the ‘proper themes’ or “the fundamental factors of human life” the unnamed critic certainly does. It would be interesting to hear what such themes might be, considering that the critic seems to have missed a minimum of two major components of life to which no person ever wishes to lay claim: loneliness and alienation. Yet, it seems likely that, like the previous critic, the author of this dismissive review had wanted Conrad to be a writer of sea stories and to keep his sea legs off dry land, lest it be in a far place populated by other ‘races.’ The “fundamental factors of human life” might here be euphemisms for social conventions and mores, which may prevent discussion of ‘others’ arriving in the English isles and of the treatment they are bound to receive. In short, those subjects of the British crown not native to the Isles should keep away from the homelands. Even to discuss their arrival is improper.

This last notion was also voiced in the vehement tone of a review by A. T. Quiller-Couch published in *The Bookman*. “‘Amy Foster’ seems to me not quite worthy of the author of ‘Youth,’ and ‘Falk’ is spoilt for me by a natural repugnance,” he writes “which perhaps has nothing to do with criticism” (Sherry 156). And though we can easily discern that the author of this passage directs one type of criticism at “Amy Foster” while being naturally repulsed by the subject of “Falk,” the two assessments seem to run together rather easily if one is not careful. It may be that Quiller-Couch had intended for the misreading to take place, or simply to juxtapose disgust with the worthiness of a subject. In either instance the reader takes away a sense of a general disgust given voice by the reviewer of these stories. Perhaps such disgust at being probed by an outsider, or

speaking of such a possibility at all, was a simple norm with which the passage played. And, perhaps Conrad had taken away from reviews such as those mentioned here a lesson in care of subject. He did not again write any story that could quite as plainly be attributed to him as its major character biographically, unless its setting was the sea and was, therefore, circumscribed to the emotional and physical states and duties of a sailor. It could be said that not even the writing contained within *A Personal Record* probes quite as deeply as seems to have been the aim of “Amy Foster”.

From the lessons of “Amy Foster”, Conrad must have taken away a substantial warning. Yet, the subject of exile and of cross-cultural communication and geographies must have been difficult to ignore for him on a personal level. And so when the idea for the story initially entitled “Razumov” presented itself, he could not help but expand it according to his experience and to code that experience within it. The story grew in length and scope, becoming less personal and bore more impact on his life as it did so. In the final analysis, *Under Western Eyes* presents its readers with yet another aspect of the exilic experience, though much better controlled and less deadly for its “protagonists.” The Teacher of Languages remains safe in his liminal space and within his veiled tasks. He does not die by violent or any other means, is not driven to leaving Geneva for any reason, is not misunderstood in any significant way by anyone close to him, especially since there is no one who comes close enough to have impact upon his character outside of the Russian story he narrates. He exists on his own terms and within his own provisional geography which seems defined by nothing beyond the sketch his story forces him to reveal. In other words, the Teacher succeeds in creating what Amar Acheariou has

termed ‘zero geography’, a geography of, by, and for the self, designed to support the exilic self no matter the particular physical location.

This is what seems to distinguish drastically the exilic characters of these two works: Yanko Gooral does not possess the kind of interior awareness necessary for the creation of such personal geography (a safe mental space in which outside influences matter little) that would have helped him span the chasm between the culture of his origin and the English village in which he found himself. The Teacher of Languages, on the other hand, has been able to form such a space for himself and thus no longer needs to verbalize his psychological geographies and chooses to share in what we can assume from the text are the two major components of his heritage instead.

It is here that the major shift in Conrad’s personal-provisional geography can be discerned. Whereas his earlier attempt seems to point to the desire to be understood as being a part of both cultures, *Under Western Eyes* displays only the desire to be understood as a cultural ambassador for both the Eastern and Western European cultures, only a cultural bridge, which does not need the reassurance of his audience in order to exist. This is accomplished through the thinnest of character outlines and points to Conrad’s own zero-geography being intact during the writing of the novel. Such personal geography is, of course, provisional as is its anchor of the moment. Conrad’s was set adrift following his meeting with his literary agent, J. B. Pinker, and took quite a few months to stabilize and quite probably longer to be rebuilt. Drawing on Jessie Conrad’s memoirs, it is not difficult to understand that Conrad had once again returned to the state in which we have seen Yanko perish. Her descriptions of Conrad’s breakdown seem to

correlate too closely with her first experience of such an event during their honeymoon and with those described in “Amy Foster” as being Yanko’s:

Clearly he was very ill, and I was horrified to see his throat was swollen out level with the end of his chin, and in a moment more he rambled off in evident delirium, using his own language and muttering fiercely words of resentment against Mr. Pinker: “Speak English ... if I can ... what does he call all I have written? I’ll burn the whole damned ... let me get up, give me a looking-glass. I must look a pretty guy, with all this beard. (*Joseph Conrad and His Circle* 142)

Within the passage it seems evident that Conrad’s notion of the self, his personal-provisional geography, was in disarray and his impetus was naturally to reconstitute himself into a familiar norm. Although Eloise Kemp Hay has suggested that after his ‘leap’ into the unknown of his willful exile “roughly until 1916 – he maintained a point of view that was *neither* Eastern *nor* Western, but perfectly poised between the two,” this zero-geography came at a price, as is evidenced by his illness (*Reconstructing “East” and “West” in Conrad’s Eyes* 24). Furthermore, this zero-geography did not draw only on his childhood experiences as a Pole, nor his sea years, nor his years in Britain. Other components, such as his uncle’s, Tadeus Bobrowski’s, memoirs must be considered as having lent the mortar with which Conrad sought to fortify his personal geography and did so publicly within the pages of *A Personal Record*.

These components of a personality, a personal and linguistic geography, lost their coherence and Conrad was again forced to recombine them in a pattern that could support his continued existence as *homo-duplex*, a Pole in exile, and an English novelist and gentleman. The notion of Conrad as an English gentleman, however, is only an assertion

based on his physical geography of the time and one can be nearly certain that the Polish *Szlachtic* (or nobleman) remained a Pole first when it came to social manners. Yet he remained a Pole who also knew how to interpret the Eastern for the benefit of the Western, that is the Anglo-French, audience. It can be said that the success of *Under Western Eyes* in Russia also proves his ability to interpret the Russian experience of emigration and exile in the West, as well as painting a testimonial of Russian autocracy for the benefit of the Russian audience. Thus, Conrad's achievement stands as that of a 'cultural bridge' that spans the divide between the Eastern and Western cultures of Europe in both directions.

In order for there to be a need to span culturally-based forms of understanding, there necessarily needs to be something that lies between the two cultures. This is not a chasm, but a hybrid of the dominant cultures, one that is neither and both at once, that has managed to adapt to the insistence of both the Eastern and Western cultural demands and has maintained its own traditions while incorporating outside influences. On the personal level, Conrad is exactly such a mixture. His advantage in the efforts to bridge the lack of understanding he encountered at times and specifically in the two works, "Amy Foster" and *Under Western Eyes*, can be attributed partially to having come from such a culture, that is, from the Eastern reaches of Central Europe. Though born so far to the East and in territory controlled by Russia, his familial traditions placed him squarely within the Central European cultural sphere. These cultural traditions then aided him in being able to span the perceived chasm and to translate the East for the benefit of the West, while also illuminating the Russian situation for Russians.

Conrad's voice has not faded with the remove of more than a hundred years since the publication of "Amy Foster". On the contrary, the predicament of the émigré and the displaced exile he had so vividly painted in this tale demands to be examined and understood with a renewed sense of urgency. It is not in the specific details of geographic origin and host cultural geography that the story's urgency lies, but in the experience of cultural and geographic displacement that has been experienced in powerful waves since the rise of Nazi Germany prior to World War II and that does not seem to have abated for very long since. It would seem that the general expectations placed on émigrés, at least in the United States, do not take into account on more than a cursory basis the psycho-social predicament of those who arrive here. Yet, those persons undergoing such displacement quite often do experience something akin to what had transpired for Yanko Gooral, if not in the letter then certainly in the spirit of the piece. Others may be lucky enough to find their very own provisional-personal geographies, as had the Teacher of Languages in *Under Western Eyes*, and, much like him, they are unlikely to divulge much, unless asked directly. Zero geography is, after all, a tenuous state and susceptible to failure when examined too closely or unwittingly attacked from without. In either case, the exile is always free to weave a personal history, a map to his or her personal geography that may help to stabilize and reinforce one's idea of oneself, just as Conrad had done in *A Personal Record*.

Epilogue: Conrad's Legacy

Time seems to temper the urgency within many subjects of experience. Yet, the experience of exile and displacement seems to be anything but less poignant on an individual level and does not seem to abate in those who experience it, despite the increasingly interconnected state of the world. Though accessibility to one's culture of origin has increased for all émigrés and exiles since Conrad's time – with the notable exception of the years during WWII – tempering some of the immediate psycho-social needs these persons experience, the desire to translate experience to the page so that it may be understood by either one's original cultural-geography or by that within which the individual finds him or herself does not seem to have disappeared. Exilic writers are present within most literatures, whether they are in internal or external exile.²¹ The experiences of James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ernest Hemingway, or F. Scott Fitzgerald come easily to the forefront of the American reader's awareness. To the European, such writers might include James Joyce, Erich Maria Remarque, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, or, more recently, Milan Kundera. Of course, these are only a few of those

²¹ This distinction is most often made in terms of exile writers and dissident writers, rather than internal or external exiles. Though that may be the case, it seems more appropriate here to make a distinction between an external and internal exile, due to the issues faced by Conrad and Poland during the partition years and beyond.

for whom exile became a reality, whether by free choice or a reasoned necessity of political and social pressures. This is not to say that one exilic novel or story and the experience upon which it is based is like another. The devil, if one might echo Ian Watt's assessment of Conrad's Teacher of Languages, is most certainly in the myriad of details wherein such experience is rooted. In order to translate the experience, which tends to be on the Richter scale for one's sense of self, that is, for one's personal geography, the various writers employ differing modes of telling.

Conrad's method in creating the Teacher of Languages in *Under Western Eyes* can be termed a veiling practice, one by which the authorial voice might merge with the fictional, yet claim its remove from identification with the story too closely. The Teacher's character is that of a 'cultural bridge' used to span the cultural geographies of Western and Eastern Europe. Yet, his own cultural geography is based elsewhere, in a provisional space that can be termed 'zero-geography' since it does not rely on either of the two blocs of cultural geography, nor can it be identified with another entirely. This zero-geography may be drawn from a myriad of experiences and influences, as well as from the Teacher's original cultural geography. Conrad's method of telling does not allow the reader to identify too closely those cultural or geographic origins, however. In the Teacher's manner and structure of the telling, the heir seems to be Milan Kundera's narrator within the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Kundera's unnamed narrator shares the obvious trait of being a first person, omniscient agent who philosophizes on various subjects, creates the story, and at times addresses his readers directly as well. His approach to the story is not the same as that of

Conrad's Teacher, however. The likeness lies in other details and pertains more generally to Conrad's concerns within *Under Western Eyes* and elsewhere. Rather than in the letter of method and construction of story, Kundera takes up the torch in its spirit.

A closer likeness to the underlying character of Conrad's teacher and his experience of exile might be drawn from Erich Maria Remarque's *Arch of Triumph*. Though the narrator bears a name and takes the center stage, relaying his own experiences of an exilic community of Germans and Russians within the confines of Paris on the brink of WWII and under German occupation, the experience is filtered through and focused upon him. Of course, readers are treated to a love story doomed from the start. Yet, this is not simply a vehicle but rather a part of the explanation, as is all of this novel, of what the exile undergoes. Perhaps of greatest import in Remarque's novel is the insistence on communicating the near-war and, as the novel progresses, wartime treatment and conditions under which the exiles existed. Whereas Conrad's Teacher had the luxury of Geneva's democratic social certainties and freedoms, Remarque's Ravic lives with the reality that the creeping autocracy is following him and all other German and Russian exiles. He cannot relax and fade into the background, but must be inventive in evading the French authorities. He also encounters his Nazi nemesis and plots to kill him, but this is less relevant to us in exploring the state of exilic existence that Remarque paints for us than his painting the realities of that time in the first place. These realities included the dissolution of the French democratic state, preceded by the failure of democracy within Germany, and touching on its collapse in Spain. There did not seem to

be any safe haven for the exiles left, but for North America. England did not seem an option.

Central European culture and its configuration as a cultural entity had once again been divided up and swallowed by the Russian and German (Prussian and Austrian, if one considers Hitler's lineage) autocratic forces during Remarque's time. Conrad had, of course, warned of such an event in his essay "Autocracy and War" at the turn of the century. Still, no one could have foreseen the brutality with which these two autocratic regimes would seize and wield power. By the close of the war, the Russian autocracy had aided in the defeat of the German and in the process had gained greater influence over the peoples of Central Europe. Although by the time Kundera began writing the brutality with which Russia had exercised that influence had once again abated and cultural geographies within the region had again been realigned somewhat, forming distinct Central (unbeknownst to the West and as inoffensively as possible to the East), Eastern, and Western European blocs, these geographies were influenced by the preceding war, as was Kundera himself. Despite the cultural geographies present within the region and despite the Russian communist-autocratic impulse and effort to Russify Central Europe, the region continued its traditional and slow reassertion of itself as cultural and political entity states. With the exception of Hungary, there came no harsh retribution against Poland or Czechoslovakia from without until 1968 and the Polish student movement, and the Czechoslovak communist party's change of guard, which allowed for the loosening of social stricture imposed by the harsh fist of Stalinist autocracy twenty years earlier. Yet, the Prague Spring was crushed by Soviet forces, an action requested by the German

communist rulers afraid of losing their own autocratic power. It is following this squelching of Central European cultural forces by, once again, Russia and Prussia, that Kundera was forced into exile in France and eventually stripped of his citizenship. In this manner, he was made to belong nowhere in particular.

Kundera's biography seems to mirror in its rough cultural and personal geographies that of Joseph Conrad. It is not, however, the intention here to make a comparative survey of the two writers' lives. Rather, it is simply to point out that Kundera had left Czechoslovakia for France in 1975 as a choice among other choices, all of which were less palatable than French exile. It was this leap that seems to point the way toward Kundera's initial identification with Conrad's political and cultural geographies. And it is this leap again that must not only have allowed him access to, but also urged him on toward an engagement with Conrad's work.

Conrad's works were by and large not available to Czech or Slovak readers prior to the Velvet Revolution of 1989, well after Kundera's engagement with them. All indicators point toward a very selective governmental oversight of any interest in Conrad's writing under the post-1948 regime. The works which were evidently available during Kundera's youth and residence in Czechoslovakia and had been translated into the Czech language include *Nostromo*, published after Stalin's death in 1958, and the second volume in a series entitled *Novelly*, published in 1954, which may have been a series of Conrad's shorter works. It is not certain, however, what selections it contained and how heavily censored these may have been. Therefore, it is probable that though he may have been familiar with some of Conrad's writing, Kundera had not had the opportunity to

engage with Conrad's works prior to his own exile, unless he had acquired copies in French or German. Once he had access to them, however, it seems evident that he did engage with the ideas and artistic methods.

As a Central European who views his cultural geography as being an integral part of Western Europe, Kundera seems to have been more than dismayed at the attitudes he encountered during the initial years of his exile. One needs only to examine his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* to find the fictional Frenchmen being attracted to a Czech émigré character on the basis of an exilic mystique. Even this 'mystique', however, led to an attitude formed not of experience, but rather of culturally specific attitudes. Kundera explains a possible formulation through the émigré character: "Did anybody ever ask her anything? Sometimes people would *tell* her what they thought about her country, but no one was interested in her own experiences" (*BLF* 94). Perhaps it is this lack of interest, among a myriad of other reasons, that he attempted to mitigate through his own writing. It was also this novel that garnered him the final expulsion from Czechoslovak society. The communist government had stripped him of his citizenship because of it. As an exile without a country to which he even nominally belonged, Kundera became a European, that is a Central-Western European writer and subject to nothing but the cultural geographies that bound these two spheres in commonality of thought. Yet, he also could not help being acutely aware of the political geographies that had sliced Europe into new cultural spheres of influence. The resulting socio-cultural, geographic perceptions this generated had probably added fuel to the fire for him. It was the same territory encountered by Conrad eighty years earlier and a similar personal predicament. Kundera

can be said to have suffered from a similar *homo-duplex* state as well. The spirit of Central Europe was “Western in complexion” to him. Furthermore, Central Europe was instrumental in the cultural health of the West. And it was this spirit and heritage that had been trounced or abandoned by the Superpowers. That spirit was still alive, though recently wounded.²²

Kundera was, of course, no Yanko Gooral, though the perceptions during the mid-to late-1970s and early 1980s of exiles from Central Europe would often seem as if that were the case. The commonality between Conrad’s perception of the Anglo-French and of Kundera’s of the French reception seems to be an idealized version of the impoverished, undereducated, and naïve, émigré seeking a ‘richer’ life in the West. Whereas such an assumption may hold true in many cases, in approximately an equal number of them it is quite false. Especially during the 1970s, those leaving the ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries of Central Europe were not seeking an economic Valhalla. Rather, they sought refuge for ideas and safety from an oppressive regime. Quite often, these exiles did not have much of a choice, having been threatened with ‘internal exile’ or having to choose exile on the other side of the ‘Iron Curtain’. The lineage that runs through the narrative of *Under Western Eyes* was alive and well during Kundera’s ordeal, in other words. It is also that of Conrad’s works that seems to have had the greatest impact on Kundera’s effort to record the situation in its myriad of details and influences.

Within his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, we can observe the transmutation that took place once Kundera had engaged Conrad’s work and subject – a

²² For a more thorough discussion of the issues faced by Kundera regarding Central European culture and his contemporaries, please see Hana Pichova’s article *Milan Kundera and the Identity of Central Europe* in Totosy de Zepetnek, Steven. *Comparative Central European Culture*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 2002.

subject he inherently shared. Within its pages one can discern the influences that the writers had in common, such as Nietzsche and Freud, and an approach to narration that is unique to both, yet displays a desire to control the story in a similar manner. While what has here been termed the story proper, that is, the story presented to its readership as a through-line or plot of the novel, contains many similarities within both *Under Western Eyes* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it is the narration in particular that bears further mention.

Though Kundera wrote this novel in his native Czech, it saw its initial publication in the French in 1984 and only a few months later in Czech, through 68 Publishers, an exile Czech language publishing house out of Toronto, Canada. What slight audience the novel had in its 'original' Czech version was limited to those in exile and what few copies may have been smuggled back behind the 'curtain'. Therefore, it was a French-speaking audience who were the initial readers of this exilic novel, that is: a Western audience. The fact of Kundera's audience being comprised mostly of Western readers and critics later became a crucial component in critical appraisals of this and others of his works from Czech dissident critics. In the debate among Czech critics a decisive split occurred along the lines of those of who had remained behind the curtain and became dissidents and those who had gone into exile in the West. Most of Kundera's prominent critics came from among the ranks of dissidents, indicating a further affinity between his and Conrad's fate in their respective home countries.

And it must also have been French, a language shared by both writers, in which he read Conrad's works. Evidence of Kundera's familiarity with Conrad's work may be

scarce, but points directly to *Under Western Eyes*. In an essay within his collection *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera uses a quote from Sophia Antonovna to illustrate the Central European condition. The unnamed narrator of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* sets up the text of the novel with a personal / philosophical essay upon which he bases the events of the story. In this manner, the likeness to Conrad's Teacher might be drawn along the lines that the latter may present his readers with a short personal / philosophical essay that is interspersed within the lines that introduce the main character of his narrative. That narrative is also heavily predicated on the very same philosophies that the narrator discusses in the introduction. Thus, storytelling is used by the Teacher even as he disclaims his abilities to create a work of fiction, while Kundera's narrator gives his readers a particular paradox which is explored throughout the novel's variations. The reader does not meet Kundera's protagonist, Tomas, until the third chapter of the first part. When this occurs, the impact is striking in relation to Conrad's work. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily in relation to *Under Western Eyes* that Tomas' introduction points us toward Conrad. Rather, it is toward *A Personal Record* and Almayer:

It seems to me that I thought of nothing whatever ... What I am certain of is, that I was very far from thinking of writing a story, though it is possible and even likely that I was thinking of the man Almayer. I had seen him for the first time some four years before from the bridge of a steamer moored to a rickety little wharf forty miles up, more or less, a Bornean river. (*PR* 74)

Conrad's voice in this passage is autobiographical and authoritative. He is the master seaman and the ideal narrator in full control of his work. He also is forgetful, digressive,

and prone to revision himself in the course of the tale. That is to say that Conrad indulges in variations on the motifs he presents. Kundera's introduction of Tomas seems to follow a similar path, while its first person narrator shares Conrad's qualities:

I have been thinking of Tomas for many years. But only in the light of these reflections did I see him clearly. I saw him standing at the window of his flat and looking across the courtyard at the opposite walls, not knowing what to do. (*ULB* 6)

The previous two chapters seem to consider and elucidate a series of thoughts Conrad had outlined following the passage quoted here. The similarity of the tone and presentation of subject points us toward an authorial narrator's voice shared, to a fair degree, by both writers.

Kundera seems to have adapted many aspects of Conrad's tandem books: *Under Western Eyes* and *A Personal Record*. The narrator's voice and persona seem to be a variation of that used by Conrad in *A Personal Record*, while the general story line and digressive narration of *Under Western Eyes* served as a framework for Kundera to explore the modern-day version of an exile's predicament, both as an exiled narrator and from the point of view of émigrés and exiles from a country quashed by the Russian autocratic machine.

There are not a few points of congruence which may be explored within these aforementioned works. It is not, however, the intent here to accuse Milan Kundera's works of being derivative from Conrad's, or any other writer's, work. Kundera may have shared the same concerns and predicaments with Conrad and thus was perhaps driven to

explore the same modes of being. Yet, he in no way seems to have sought to duplicate Conrad's works. Rather, Kundera had engaged in a dialogue with the ideas and predicaments, sometimes making these clearer for his readers and other times bringing them into his modern day cultural geographies as these presented themselves to him. His efforts bore fruit in the manner that Central European culture has been understood slightly better in the West and America, while in places like Iran his works, though heavily censored, seem to provide a cultural bridge across the divide of political and economic barriers placed in the way of better understanding among cultural geographies that may be inconvenient to those autocrats and others holding the reigns.

While the scope to which Conrad's and Kundera's works seem to share concerns, subjects, and narration techniques requires an analytical effort beyond the focus of this study, it is fair to say that there is much left to unearth in such an effort.

Appendix A:
Abbreviations

AG *Arrow of Gold*

NN *The Nigger of the Narcissus*

NLL *Notes on Life and Letters*

PR *A Personal Record*

UWE *Under Western Eyes*

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